New Magazine

Love Stories
of the American Girl

ALL-STORY

Combined with MUNSEY

SEP 28 1929

20¢ COPY
Canada 25¢

OCTOBER 5
On Sale Every Other Wednesday

THE YEAR
$4.00

Newest Styles
Dignified Credit at Saving Prices

10 DAYS' FREE TRIAL

Sent for $1 — **Balance 12 MONTHS TO PAY**

12 Months to Pay

DT1-Newest Butterfly design, of 18K Solid White Gold engagement ring set with sparkling, genuine blue-white diamond. $4.08 a mo.

$29.50

DT28-Gorgeously hand engraved 18K Solid White Gold "Bridal Blossom" wedding ring; 5 fiery genuine blue-white diamonds. $2.37 a mo.

$42.50

DT27-The "Bridal Blossom"—Hand pierced lace design engagement ring of 18K Solid White Gold, genuine blue-white diamond of rare brilliance. $3.46 a mo.

$48.50

DT12-Dazzling cluster of 7 perfectly matched genuine blue white diamonds; hand pierced 18K Solid White Gold lady's mounting. Looks like $750 solitaire. $3.96 a mo.

$42.50

DT10-Gorgeous lace design hand pierced 18K Solid White Gold dinner ring; 3 fiery, genuine, blue-white diamonds; 2 French-blue sapphires. $3.46 a mo.

$75

DT23-Modern, square-prong, engagement ring in new "step" design 18K Solid White Gold set with specially selected dazzling, genuine blue-white diamond. $6.15 a month.

$50

DT7-New, massive, gentleman's ring of 14K Solid Green Gold and 18K Solid White Gold top; with a flashing, genuine blue-white diamond. $4.08 a month.

$29.50

DT25-Latest style, modernistic effect 18K Solid White Gold lady's ring; fiery genuine blue-white diamond. $2.37 a month.

No Red Tape
No Delay

$27.50

DT 31 - Nationally known **ELGIN** or **WALTHAM** Handsomely engraved new style case. Guaranteed Elgin or Waltham movement. **Warranted 14K White or Green Gold filled 25-year case.** Latest style flexible mesh wrist band to match. $2.21 a mo.

$37.50

DT8-Diamond wrist watch. 14K Solid White Gold engraved case; 2 genuine diamonds, 8 emeralds or sapphires. Guaranteed 15-jewel movement. Pierced flexible bracelet with sapphires or emeralds to match. $3.04 a month.

Guaranteed Savings

Direct Diamond Importations and large volume buying for both our National Mail Order business and our Chain Store system enable us to offer you superior quality genuine diamonds, fine standard watches and exquisite jewelry at saving prices which are beyond comparison. All of this with no extra charge for the added convenience and advantage of dignified, liberal credit.

How to Order

Just send **$1.00** with your order and your selection comes to you on **10 Days' Free Trial. No C.O.D. to pay on arrival.** After full examination and free trial, pay balance in 12 equal monthly payments.

Satisfaction Guaranteed
10 Days' Free Trial

You have the full privilege of 10 days' free trial—if not completely satisfied return shipment at our expense and the entire deposit will be refunded. Written guarantee bond with every purchase.

All Dealings Strictly Confidential

A whole year to pay! No extra charge—no red tape. **You take no risk**—satisfaction absolutely guaranteed or money back.

Gift Cases Free

Every article comes to you in a most beautiful and appropriate presentation case.

$27.50

DT22-Gentleman's massive, hand engraved ring of 14K Solid White Gold Imported black Onyx with a genuine diamond and any carved initial or emblem desired. $2.21 mo.

$24.50

DT9-The "Princess Pat"—14K Solid White Gold engraved case, guaranteed 15-jewel movement. Engraved genuine "Wristacrat" flexible bracelet to match. $1.96 a month.

IT'S A BULOVA $29.75

DT5 - Nationally advertised guaranteed 15-jewel Gent's BULOVA watch. White Gold filled case, "dust-tite" protector; radium dial and hands; latest style woven wrist band to match. $2.39 a mo.

CASH PRICES AT CREDIT TERMS

Send for this **CATALOGUE**

FREE To Adults

Completely illustrated new catalog of genuine diamonds; Bulova, Elgin, Waltham, Hamilton, Howard, Illinois watches; fine jewelry and silverware at special prices. **Write now to get your Free Copy.**

$27.50

DT19-Nationally known 15-jewel **WALTHAM** movement; **20-year** warranted engraved **White Gold** filled, 12 size, thin model, decagon case. Tested and regulated. White Gold filled knife, fine Waldemar chain. All complete in handsome gift case. $2.21 a mo.

ESTABLISHED 1895

ROYAL DIAMOND AND WATCH CO.

Address Dept. 42-X, 170 Broadway, New York

October 5
1929

ALL-STORY

Combined with MUNSEY'S

Volume I
No. 1

"Oh dear," sighed the pretty girl hanging to the subway strap, as she flipped the pages of her magazine impatiently, "aren't there any more good old-fashioned love stories? With real lovers? I never seem to find one."

Perhaps the pretty girl didn't know why good love stories are scarce—didn't know that nowadays authors seem to be turning scientists and studying love coolly under their microscopes. Writing heavy stories, that explain and explain—

And still somewhere a girl is laughing, a vagrant breeze sighs over a garden, a moon lilts on the waters—and a man and a maid look into each other's eyes and say, "I love you."

Love lives, and dreams do come true!

And still there are authors who can warm the printed page with the very breath of love.

Turn this page—and forget your subway strap, your typewriter keys, your too flat purse.

Here's a feast of love stories to lose yourself in; the best love stories you've ever read.

Here's ALL-STORY, *the new Love Story Magazine, the magazine of good old-fashioned love stories with lovers you'll recognize as your own friends.*

And, we hope, as yourself.

THE EDITORS.

Her stranger sweetheart won her heart and broke her pride. Was she to have only

Remembered Rapture

By BEULAH POYNTER

CHAPTER I

"YOU haven't heard a word I said."

Vivie, startled out of an absorbing daydream, turned bewildered gray eyes to her companion and regarded him contritely. "I haven't, Billy," she admitted with the whimsical smile that was one of her greatest charms. "Now, just what did you say?"

"Oh, nothing of any importance, I suppose," sullenly. "I mentioned the fact that I'd had a raise in salary, and suggested that if you were at all in-

"Then you're crazy!" Bill hit the table so hard the dishes rattled. But Vivie only laughed

terested I'd be rather pleased to make your Mrs. William Harley."

Vivie's pink cheeks grew a shade pinker. Her candid eyes, with the golden flecks like dancing sunbeams in their irises, clouded. "Oh, Billy, I'm sorry."

"Sorry because you didn't hear what I said, or sorry because of *what* I said?"

"Both. I was rude—unintentionally, and—somehow I've never thought of marriage between you and me."

"Why not? We've played around together quite a bit in the last year. I'm not altogether unpresentable. I've fairly good prospects, and I had a hunch you might be fond of me."

"I am, Billy."

"And I'd be an awful dub if I didn't care for you. You're just about the prettiest, sweetest, cleverest—"

"Oh, spare me!" she laughed, putting both hands over her ears.

"What say, Vivie, shall we?"

"I couldn't, Billy."

"Don't you want to marry? Wouldn't you like a home?"

"Yes—but not with you, dear. Don't be angry, please. We've been wonderful friends, but we'd be disastrous as man and wife."

"I don't see why. Just because you're kind of a blue stocking doesn't mean we couldn't get along together, if we love each other."

"But I don't love you, Billy. Even if I did, I wouldn't marry you."

"Well! I thought you were the kind who'd be satisfied with a good home and a fair income."

"I would be, but you and I have nothing in common, Billy. The things I want you'd never enjoy. You'd consider them foolish."

"Yes? What, for instance?" There was a dry note in his voice.

Again her eyes became vague. A faint smile crept about her lovely wistful mouth. "Good books, Billy. I'd love to own them. Have them for my very own, not just borrow them from the library and have to return them only half digested. I'd like to hear the great music of the world, let it sink into my soul and feed it with beauty. I want to see the masterpieces of art, become drunk with their color and lines and messages. I want to study and store up values for the dry years of my old age. I'm young now, I'm rather popular, I've a good position, I manage to dress well, but Billy, my soul is hungry."

Billy's expression was utterly blank. "Of all the queer girls!" he ejaculated.

"If I married you I'd stagnate. You're good-natured, Billy, and you'd be kind, but you're stubborn, and your will is stronger than mine. You'd have your way. I'd go to baseball games with you, and dances—maybe prize fights—and where would I find time for study? I'd become a shadow of you, and the real me would die."

"Haven't you enjoyed trotting around with me?"

"Yes. But it's only occasionally we see each other."

"Well, I'd never interfere with anything you wanted to do, even if it does sound crazy to me."

"You think you wouldn't, but you would, you couldn't help yourself."

"And where do you think you're going to find a guy who'll feed your starving soul?" he asked sarcastically. "Believe me, a roof over your head and three square meals a day are pretty necessary, even for an ambitious girl like you."

"I hope to have them also. Maybe I'm optimistic. But unless I find a man who wants food for his spirit as well as his body, I'll never marry."

"If there's food for your spirit, as you call it, in pounding old Granville's typewriter all day, then I'm a Dutchman. It's barely possible that life with me, prosaic and commonplace as I am, would be better than a stenographer's job."

"A lot better, Billy." She laid one hand on his. "You're a dear to want me. Please don't be hurt. I wouldn't make you happy, and some other girl will, I know. Besides, I don't intend to stay with Granville always. I'm saving every penny I can to travel, and just now I'm seriously considering this advertisement."

She handed him a newspaper she had been holding in her lap. One slender forefinger touched the printed words she mentioned.

Billy's black brows contracted as he read:

WANTED — Traveling companion to cultured lady going for extended tour through Europe. Must be young, educated, refined, with good references, familiar with and fond of the arts, particularly music and painting. Apply after 2 P.M., Mrs. Amelia Craven, Riverview Hotel, Riverside Drive.

"And you've already seen the lady."

"No, but I think I shall. In fact, I was just deciding to do so after dinner when you came." She smiled, but there was a hint of bravado in her manner.

"Yes? And if she thinks you're what she's looking for—"

"I shall accept the position."

"Then you're crazy!" He hit the table so hard the dishes rattled, and other diners in the *table d'hôte* restaurant glanced at him with curiosity. "She says, 'companion,' but you'd be only a maid, a servant. How'd you like that? You're too independent to be at the beck and call of some fussy old woman. A fine time you'd have of it, traipsing all over Europe waiting on an invalid, carrying hot water bottles and pills and reading trashy love stories."

"Please! Please!" she laughed. "Don't get excited. If I like her, and she likes me, I'll go. If not, I'll wait for something better. But it's worth looking into, isn't it?"

"And what about me?"

"You, Billy, will remain as you've always been—a dear, very enjoyable friend, nothing more. And when you are married to some one else—"

"Rats!"

"I shall send you my best wishes, and, if I'm rich enough, a wedding present. Now, if you've finished dinner, maybe you wouldn't mind a bus ride uptown with me, while I give Mrs. A. Craven the once-over."

Without replying, Billy motioned the waiter, paid his check, and assisted the girl into a rather shabby raccoon coat. For a second his hands rested on her slim shoulders, and a spasm of pain shot across his face as a loose curl of her Titian hair brushed against his cheek. She was altogether lovely, so intensely feminine and fragile that it was unbelievable she could be so independent.

The ride uptown on the bus was a silent one. Vivie's thoughts were racing. She wondered if she would really accept the position if it were offered. Whether it would not be a mistake to do so. She was really very fond of Bill Harley, despite the difference in tastes.

Unquestionably he would amount to something some day. Perhaps she would never find a man she liked any better. Maybe her ideal was too high, too fine to exist.

She had a healthy wholesome desire for love, for children, and a home; most of all, for love. But she was certain she could never love Billy, not as she understood love, with its thrills, ecstasies, moments of bliss alternated with deep depression. Better to live all of life alone, better to search vainly for complete happiness, than to give one's self and one's dreams and lukewarm affection to a man who could never understand.

THE Riverview was an immense structure of ornate brick facing the Palisades. There were liveried men at the entrance, more at the elevators. A little overawed at the grandeur of Persian rugs, imitations of masterpieces and the solemn obsequiousness of the lackeys, Vivie crossed to the desk and asked to be announced to Mrs. Craven. While waiting, she turned to Billy, who, scowling and most unhappy, had accompanied her into the building.

"Want to wait for me?" she asked. "Or are you going to run along?"

"I'll wait."

"It may be some time."

"I'll wait."

"Mrs. Craven says to come up," the clerk informed her. "Suite seventy-five."

A trim maid in rose-colored silk and organdie admitted her into the boxlike foyer, then led the way into an im-

mense drawing-room. Vivie had an impression of much crowded space, overstuffed chairs, rosewood piano, polished floors, slippery silken rugs and softly shaded lamps, before a plump little woman in a heavily embroidered yellow kimona emerged from a pile of cushions on a divan.

"My goodness!" the little woman ejaculated. "If you aren't the first presentable person I've seen."

Vivie laughed in spite of her nervousness. "You're Mrs. Craven?"

"Uh-uh; sit down. There—under the light, so's I can get a good look at you. You've come about the job—er—position of traveling companion, haven't you?"

"Yes." Vivie seated herself in a low deep cushioned chair under a lamp held in the upstretched arms of a very pink Venus.

"Well—" Mrs. Craven adjusted her pillows and dropped back on the couch. "I reckon you want to know what it's all about." Her voice was a trifle shrill, with a vacuous quality that corresponded with her china blue eyes, ash blond hair, and the bland expression on her pretty plump face. "I suppose you have references?"

"I can furnish them."

"And you don't mind being away from home for a year, maybe longer?"

"I have no home—except what I make myself."

"No relatives?"

"No."

"Too bad, and you're so young." The sympathy seemed genuine. "I'm alone, too. Mr. Craven died a year ago. 'Spose you tell me something about yourself."

Briefly Vivie sketched her short career. Her father had been a sea captain, but had died when she was very small. Her mother had lived to see Vivie grown, then passed away. Since that time she had supported herself. At present she was employed as stenographer by a law firm. She had studied one year at college, and was twenty years old.

"No fellows—I mean, attachments?"

"I'm not engaged," Vivie smiled.

"You're so pretty, I don't know how you've escaped. Maybe because you're clever. I can see you're clever." The little widow's laugh was a birdlike trill, more youthful than her face. "I'm not a bit clever. Mr. C. used to call me dumb, but I'm not quite that. Now, it's this way. I'm not educated, and I swear I don't believe I ever will be. I just can't get things into my head. But I've got a lot of money. I had some before I married Mr. C., and he left me a heap more—Texas oil. I'm from Texas. As long as he lived I was satisfied in Fort Worth, but now I'm alone, and I'm—well, darn lonesome. Having money and living in a smart hotel isn't anything if you're lonesome. I joined some clubs, but I might just as well stay at home for all the good they do me. The women say 'Howdy,' and are pleasant, then get to talking about books and music and Italy and things I don't know a darn thing about, and then leave me as if I never existed. They've never invited me to their homes. I know this much, if you don't know anything, they don't want you around. I want to learn. I want to mix with 'em, those women. And I want to marry again. That's the case in a nutshell."

Vivie's expression did not change. "That's quite natural," she said.

"Lon Stallart says I'm all right as I am—Lon's a boy from my home who wants me, but I married one common fellow, I want a gentleman this time.

So I've decided I'm going to Italy. I'm going to see things, and learn things, and I want somebody with me who can tell me what I should see and who can remember what I forgot. Could you do it?"

"I've never traveled," Vivie said slowly, "but I've always wanted to. I've always been interested in art, and I'm an omniverous reader."

Her eyes traveled to the well-filled bookcase. Mrs. Craven noted the glance.

"Yes. I got a lot of good books. A clerk told me what to buy. All the classics, but I go to sleep when I try to read them. I just can't get interested, and I don't see how any one can. Have you read 'em?"

"Not all, I'm afraid."

"But you know about Leonardo Cellini and Angelo and all of them, don't you?"

Vivie coughed. "You mean the painters?"

"Yes."

"I know a little."

"I've gone over to the Metropolitan Museum a dozen times, but I can't tell a good picture from a bad one, and I feel kind of ashamed to ask. I couldn't find any Cellinis there."

"Perhaps you didn't look for Cellini in the right department," Vivie suggested tactfully. "Cellini was a goldsmith. The Metropolitan has a priceless cup of gold and mother-of-pearl which he made."

Mrs. Craven laughed. "My Lordie! If you'd heard what those women were saying about him in the Literary Club the other day you'd a thought he really was something great."

Vivie's mouth twitched, but she wisely said nothing. Mrs. Craven rambled on for some time, and out of her half incoherent chatter Vivie gleaned that she was prepared to pay her companion one hundred dollars a month and all expenses; that her companion must read the latest and most talked of books, and in turn inform her of their contents in such a manner that she could converse intelligently about them; that her companion must attend the opera and likewise educate her in music, and that during their travels abroad the companion should visit art galleries, discriminate in famous paintings and statuary, and later act as guide and teacher to her.

It seemed a big order to Vivie. Mrs. Craven appeared good-natured, generous, but silly, and not far from stupid. It was one thing to inform a clever person, another to teach a stupid one. But—

"I should like the position," Vivie said quietly.

"All right. Bring your references to-morrow—I don't think they're necessary, I like you already—but it's the thing to do, and if you're all I think you are, the job—er, position—is yours."

Billy had gone when Vivie left the elevator. For this she was thankful. There would have been a scene. Billy was not one to take dismissal lightly, and she was just a little uncertain whether or not she had acted wisely in arguing with him. At any rate, she was going to Italy.

Mrs. Craven might prove a trial, but there would be compensations. Who knows what adventure might befall her?

CHAPTER II

MRS. CRAVEN was not a good sailor, and demanded constant attention. Only twice during the voyage did she leave her stateroom.

Vivie was more than relieved when the ship docked at Naples, and she had visions of visits to Pompeii and Capri. These were soon dispelled. Mrs. Craven declared she knew a lady who said Naples was the dirtiest place on earth, and one was foolish to stay there unless compelled to do so. The same lady had said Florence was the only city in Italy worth visiting.

So, rather reluctantly, Vivie purchased railroad tickets for Florence the following day, hoping that some one would give her employer correct information on Rome and Venice, and that she would believe it.

Vivie was prepared for Continental trains. She tried to convince the widow one could not wait until the last minute to arrive at the station and hope to find good seats, but the word "hurry" was not in Amelia Craven's vocabulary. She dallied with her toilet as usual, grumbled over having to get out of bed so early, and almost missed the train; consequently, all the desired places were gone.

With a look of profound disgust she squeezed herself in between two corpulent Italians, and, assuming the air of a duchess, commanded Vivie to find the conductor and see they were given decent accommodations before the porter put their baggage in place.

Vivie realized it was useless for her to attempt the impossible. She had seen no conductor. And she could not speak Italian. The porter was fuming over the delay, and would not wait.

With a sigh of resignation she started down the corridor. All the compartments were crowded. She went into the next car. At the extreme end of it she found a compartment with only two occupants, a man and a woman, both Americans, judging from their appearance.

The door was closed, but she pushed it ajar and inquired timidly:

"Are any of these places vacant?"

The woman, who was staring out of the window, turned quickly in a startled fashion. "No," she said coldly. "They are all taken." A glance passed between her and her companion, who had risen at Vivie's question.

Vivie had a feeling that the answer was an untruth. She saw no baggage other than that over the seats occupied by the couple, and the woman's long green eyes had seemed defiant. For a moment Vivie hesitated. Then, murmuring an apology for intruding, she withdrew.

Perhaps there might be more room in the second-class. If no one told her, Mrs. Craven would never know the difference. Vivie passed through the vestibule and began her search. Halfway down the aisle of the third car she heard the shrill whistle of the engine, then a chug chug that informed her the train was moving.

Suppose all the luggage had not been placed on the train! She whirled so suddenly she collided with a young man going in the other direction.

"Oh, dear!" she gasped. "I beg your pardon!" Then she looked into a pair of hazel eyes with such a merry twinkle in them that she laughed.

Strictly speaking, the owner of the merry eyes was not handsome. His features were a trifle too rugged and irregular for beauty, but there was strength in his lean bronzed jaw, whimsy in his mouth, and intelligence in his eyes. Tall, well knit, with a breadth of shoulder and narrowness of hip that indicated the athlete, he towered over Vivie.

When he spoke it was in a low musical voice absolutely in harmony with his deep chest and tanned skin.

"I beg your pardon. I'm so huge I take up the whole aisle."

Something happened to Vivie. She didn't know it then. She only realized that that one trite phrase spoken in a low musical voice thrilled her more than Billy Harley's proposal of marriage had done; that the strong brown hand placed on her arm to steady her sent a little tingle through her whole body, and that the whimsical eyes seemed to look down into her very soul.

Hot flaming color spread over her cheeks, and mounted to the soft reddish curls on her forehead. She had an impulse to run. But for some reason she stood there, unable to move.

The young man interrupted a short, though tense, silence. "Is there anything wrong? You seemed to be hurrying."

"I was," she gasped, then giggled helplessly when she realized her past movement was not compatible with her standing still in the aisle. "I was hunting for seats, and I forgot our luggage. I don't know if it's all on the train."

"Second-class?"

"We're—we're traveling first, but I left Mrs. Craven back there. She's probably on the verge of hysterics."

"I'll go with you, if you don't mind, and see what I can do," he said quietly.

Mind! Vivie's heart thumped hard against her breast, then resumed its normal beating. She smiled gratefully, drew away a bit reluctantly from the steadying fingers, and started back to the car where Mrs. Craven awaited her.

She found the widow alone, with the various suitcases in a heap on the floor. Her round pink face was twisted into a network of wrinkles that smoothed miraculously when she saw her companion.

"My Lordie!" she chirped. "I sure thought something had happened to you. Those people in here found out they should be in third class and got out, then there was no one to put the valises up there, and no porter, and what are we going to do?"

"This gentleman has kindly offered to help us," Vivie said when Mrs. Craven paused for breath.

The widow's eyes rested for a moment on the stranger's well-cut overcoat, his low English shoes. Then she extended her hand graciously.

"Thank you, thank you so much, Mr.—er—Mr.—"

"Mellish," he supplied.

Vivie saw the young man appraise the diamonds that were just a little too plentiful on the plump fingers. Strangely, her annoyance was because of the lavish display of wealth, rather than because he had noticed it.

With the utmost ease he lifted the heavy suitcases and swung them into the racks over the seats, then he bowed and started to withdraw.

Mrs. Craven, with a little gurgle of hospitality, urged him to remain in the compartment.

He smiled, a slow boyish grin that exposed very white teeth and crinkled the corners of his eyes. "I'd like nothing better, thank you. But, you see, I'm traveling second-class."

The widow's cordiality vanished. Like all climbers she was a snob. Second-class meant poverty to her.

"A good-looking young man, Vivie," she said after he had gone, "but common. You must be very careful of the acquaintances you make while traveling."

Vivie did not answer. Her voice might betray her emotions. If Mr. Mellish was common, what was Amelia Craven? Probably he was poor, but

one could not measure values in wealth. She wondered if he was American or English. He had a faint accent that inclined her to believe him the latter. Was he a tourist? There was something purposeful about him in spite of his merry eyes.

Curious, that she was so trembly, quivering in every nerve. Tired, perhaps, and terribly bored with Mrs. Craven's inane chatter.

At Rome, where the train paused for some little time, Vivie left her employer sleeping soundly and stepped out on the platform to stretch her cramped limbs. She saw the couple who had occupied the compartment alone alight with their baggage. The man, seemingly in a great hurry, hailed a taxi and hustled his companion into it. Just behind them a veiled woman with a small hand bag cornered another taxi.

Turning to reënter the train, Vivie caught a glimpse of Mr. Mellish standing in a vestibule two cars ahead. He was looking after the veiled woman.

Her lips tightened a little. One should be careful of the acquaintances one made in traveling.

FLORENCE at night, seen through a cold drizzle, was not attractive. The narrow deserted streets and ancient gray buildings under the flickering gaslight seemed desolate and forbidding.

With the aid of a courier from the American Express, Vivie secured a taxi and, after the porter had been paid, the luggage piled in with the driver, and the sleepy, disgruntled Mrs. Craven huddled into the cab's musty interior, the girl sank back with a little shiver of disappointment.

She had looked about the station for Mr. Mellish, hoping that Florence was his destination also, but had not seen him. Evidently the first man who had ever caused her pulses to race had stepped for one moment into her life, and then stepped right out again.

Through tortuous cavernous passages, across silent piazzas, the cab clattered noisily, then turned into a wide *via* fronting the sluggish brown Arno. Through the drizzle Vivie saw the vague outline of bridges spanning the river, and the somber age-stained walls of the buildings beyond them.

A flood of light from the hotels on the Lungarno turned the wet pavement into a black glistening ribbon, and mellowed the drab ramparts of the river.

The taxi came to so sudden a pause she was half thrown from her seat and the widow's hat was twisted askew. A concierge emerged from the building; smiled them a greeting, looked at the meter, paid the bill, then motioned a bright eyed youngster to come after their luggage.

"*Si si, signorina;* the rooms are reserve'. *Si, si,* just as you weesh."

Large high-ceilinged rooms, with massive beds and quaint marble-topped dressers and tables. Draperies of crimson damask, and rugs faded with age to a glorious motley of colors. Antiques that would be priceless to collectors.

Mrs. Craven sniffed and opened the shutters of a window that looked upon a walled-in garden, bowered with wistaria.

"'Stuffy place,'" was her comment. "'And will you look at the furniture, Vivie?' It's so old, it belongs in somebody's garret.'"

Vivie did not answer. She loosened the other's tight frock, unbound her mass of ash blond hair, ran her bath, then bade her good night.

Her own room was across the corridor, facing the river. For some time

she stood at the casement, with the chill rain beating against her hot face, while she tried to realize that by some miracle of good fortune the dreams of her childhood had come true.

She was in the city of Dante and Beatrice. On that bridge spanning the River Arno, Dante had met the woman who had inspired his Divine Comedie, and had loved her with an undying devotion. Other lovers had lived their romance in Florence; Andrea del Sarto, the Brownings, George Eliot, lovers! Billy loved her, and she had put him out of her life. Would another love ever be offered her to accept or refuse?

A pair of hazel eyes and a laughing mouth developing out of the mist, answered her question.

CHAPTER III

SUNLIGHT flooded the chamber, mellowed the faded draperies and turned into living gold the red curls pressed against the white pillow. A warm breeze, balmy and soft as the breath of a child, touched Vivie's cheeks. She opened wondering eyes, blinked uncertainly. Then, springing out of bed, ran to the window. She looked upon a picture that made her a little dizzy, made her clasp slim hands over her girlish bosom and draw a deep breath of ecstasy.

Florence in the sunshine! The city of her dreams!

She roused the sleeping widow. "The sun is shining, Mrs. Craven, and it's wonderful! We mustn't waste a minute."

Mrs. Craven grunted.

"We'll go to the Piazza della Signoria first," Vivie continued excitedly, "and see the loggia where Cellini's famous statue is, then we'll—"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, go away and let me sleep. I don't care what you do, just leave me alone."

Vivie, laughing softly, obeyed. With her sketch book under her arm she stepped out upon the Lungarno. She had a definite idea of which way to go, and as she wandered along, peering into shop windows with displays of marbles, tooled leather goods and copies of Titian and Raphael, she wondered at the crowds in the streets.

At each corner a blue-clad policeman waved her to move on and refused her permission to turn. Puzzled, she tried to convey where she wished to go. One officer in broken English told her to go three blocks further on, then turn to her left. She did so, only to find herself blocked by a procession of black-shirted little boys, and officers at all corners to hold back the throng of cheering Florentines.

"This is too exasperating!" she exclaimed aloud.

"I quite agree with you!"

She whirled suddenly, her face crimson at the sound of that voice. Mellish stood beside her on the curbstone.

"I—I didn't know you were in Florence!" she gasped. "I didn't see you get off the train." Then, realizing she had betrayed her interest in him, she added quickly: "I'm trying to get through this mob to the Uffizi Gallery, but I seem to be out of luck."

"It's a Fascisti parade. The piazza will be blocked for hours. But why visit an art gallery on a bright day like this when Florence has so many gray ones?"

"I don't feel that I should waste a minute, especially since Mrs. Craven has given me the morning to myself."

"Mrs. Craven?"

"My employer. I'm just her companion."

"Oh!" There was such frank admiration in his glance, Vivie could not resent the monosyllable. "I'm going over to Boboli Gardens myself. Wonder if you'd care to go with me?"

Just for a moment Vivie hesitated, then she said softly, "I'd love to."

"Dante's love for Beatrice is one of the most beautiful associations Florence holds for me." As if unconsciously, his warm fingers pressed into the soft flesh at the bend of her arm.

Vivie choked. She felt smothery. If only she could think of something

Her heart singing, she tried to rouse her sleeping employer, but got only a sleepy grunt

"Shall we walk? It isn't far."

She nodded. He took her arm, and again the sweet tingle at his touch invaded her. There was a singing in her ears. Every pulse and nerve was kindled with the swift rush of new tumultuous emotions. Her throat throbbed and her knees quivered under her. She hoped he wouldn't notice her embarrassment, an embarrassment at once acutely painful and overwhelmingly wonderful.

"We'll cross Dante's bridge," he said. If only she weren't so self-conscious.

"You—you know Florence very well?" she stammered.

"I spent my childhood here. Dad was a painter of sorts. I used to dab a little myself. And I love the old city."

"I love it, too, though this is my first visit."

"It usually takes time for Florence to get under one's skin," he mused. "There's not much outward show. It

hasn't the grandeur of Rome, nor the beauty of Naples, but it has soul."

"That's it!" Vivie breathed. "Soul! And I feel it."

He looked down at her with a sort of a rapt understanding, and for a second gray eyes met brown in a lingering glance that was almost a caress. He turned abruptly away.

"Shall you stay long?" he asked.

"That depends on Mrs. Craven. We're supposed to stay the rest of the winter here, but she's rather erratic, and may change her mind."

THEY were on Ponte della Grazia now. For a moment they stood watching the sand workers, lithe brown men clad only in trousers and undershirts, separating the golden grains with their nets. Vivie, leaning over the rail, closed her eyes and visioned herself back six hundred years. Mellish stood beside her in silence, a silence unbroken as they moved on.

In beautiful Boboli Garden Vivie felt she had stepped from commonplace realities into the Garden of Eden.

"I didn't know this existed," she said in a smothered voice.

"No. Guide books rarely mention it, but to me it's indescribably beautiful and marvelous. A hundred years from now little of it will be left, and a hundred years ago it was more nearly perfect than to-day."

The pulse in Vivie's slender throat throbbed. Her heart-shaped face was waxen white. A little shiver of awe ran down her spine. She felt very close to tears, tears that had nothing to do with unhappiness. An absolute need for physical contact made her extend one hand to Mr. Mellish, a gesture as unconscious as breath. His fingers closed over hers, warm understanding fingers.

"I'm all choked," she said with a half sob. "I feel so little, so inconsequential, when I realize what others have done."

"There must be us mediocrities to feed the vanity and flame of genius," he said gravely. "Once I fancied myself an artist. Every day I visited Pitti Palace and painted, Lord, how I painted. Then the absolute inability to put one tithe of what I desired upon canvas made me destroy all I had done."

"Oh! What a pity," she said with ready sympathy.

"No." He shook his head. "No. The pity was I did not try then to do the thing for which I was fitted."

"You don't paint any more?" she asked softly.

"There's an urge at times, but I push it aside. Thwarted ambition is an ugly bedfellow, and I like to sleep soundly." He laughed. "Please take off your hat, Miss Bowen."

She complied, a little surprised.

He sighed. "I thought so. It's Titian. He would have adored painting you."

"Oh, please."

"With the sunlight behind you, and that terrace of flowers—even I might put you on canvas and not be ashamed of my picture. You are very, very beautiful."

It was said without flattery, except for the look in his eyes as they devoured her, and, though Vivie's hand trembled a little as she tucked back a red strand, she said nothing.

The hours passed swiftly, so swiftly in fact that Vivie was seized with panic when Mellish suggested they cross the river to a tea shop on Vittorio Emmanuel and have luncheon.

"Oh, I couldn't!" she gasped. "Mrs. Craven will be furious at my leaving

her alone so long. I had no idea it was so late. I must get a taxi at once."

"I'll take you to your hotel," he suggested.

"No, no thanks. I don't know what she would say if she knew I'd not been alone. Please, I'd much rather you just put me in the taxi."

Knowing her employer very well by now, Vivie was sure Mrs. Craven not only would object to her having accepted attentions from a stranger, but those objections would be stronger because he was a poor man.

Mellish secured a taxi and assisted her into it. "I may be going to Rome to-morrow," he said quietly. "I'm hoping it won't be necessary, but if I'm still here may I see you again?"

"Oh, yes." Vivie was sure her morning would be free.

"Where will you be—say, at nine?"

"Why, I love the Gardens, don't you? We—er—I think I'll come again in the morning."

Eyes looked deep into eyes as they parted.

CHAPTER IV

VIVIE found the widow in a lounge that opened upon the flower-bowered courtyard. She was in animated conversation with an elderly gentleman who looked very bored. As the girl drew near she heard Mrs. Craven's impression of Naples:

"The sea is beautiful, of course, and Vesuvius divine, but the city, why the lower East Side in New York is cleaner. I said to my companion, I didn't come abroad for this. Do let's hurry on to Florence."

She smiled brightly at Vivie and introduced the old gentleman, who used Vivie's arrival as an excuse to get away.

A vivid description of what her companion had seen placated the widow, and with the decision to drive about the city that afternoon, they went into the dining room for luncheon.

If Vivie's afternoons were tiresome, sometimes almost wearing her patience to shreds, her mornings were a never-ending delight, for Glen Mellish did not go to Rome.

For the first few days they met in Boboli Gardens as if by accident; later they made definite appointments. Together they rambled over the city, visited museums, art galleries and cathedrals, read Browning aloud and relived his love story in the old house whose plate bore his name.

A little sight-seeing sufficed Mrs. Craven. She was more than satisfied to see masterpieces through Vivie's eyes. But the shops intrigued her. Vivie enjoyed many precious hours while the other woman was haggling over pieces of rare lace, embroideries and antiques, and paying exorbitant prices for things she would never use.

The widow was a sociable creature. To Vivie's great joy, during the second week of their stay she made some bridge-playing acquaintances and dispensed with her companion's services for the evening.

Vivie went to her room, determined to write in her neglected diary and fill in some sketches she had made that day, but the moon-flooded Lungarno, the soft perfumed air of the warm night allured her.

On the wall of the river a pair of lovers sat locked in each other's arms, the pallid moon picking out the white of the girl's frock.

A sharp stab of pain went through Vivie's heart. Did Glen Mellish *love* her? In his eyes she had read admiration, in the pressure of his hands ten-

derness, sympathy and understanding, but his lips had voiced nothing. She loved him. Every beat of her heart, every quivering nerve in her body, every waking thought were his. Spiritually, mentally, physically, she knew she belonged to him. He was her mate.

Even if she were never to see him again, she would always thank God for having known him, thank God for the previous divine gift of love and the hours of unalloyed happiness she'd spent with Glen Mellish.

Where was he now? This glorious evening and freedom. If only she knew where to telephone him she would overcome scruples and do so. The desire to see him and to hear his voice was so overwhelming she paced the room in an agony of restlessness.

At last the four walls became unendurable. She put on hat and coat and descended the stairs. At the desk she requested the concierge to get her a fiacre.

He looked at her in amazement. Signorina going out alone at this hour? Unheard of. She shrugged off his protests and, when the cab arrived, had him direct the driver to take her along the river and Via Cavour. "For an hour," she added, "it's too lovely to stay in doors."

As she stepped into the cab a man and woman passed. For a moment it was as though a thunderbolt had struck the girl. A wave of red flame enveloped her, and but for the concierge's arm she would have fallen. The man was Mellish, and his companion—unquestionably was the veiled woman Vivie had seen him staring after from the train vestibule!

Jealousy is a vicious companion. It sends darts of suspicion into the most trusting hearts, chills the warmest affections, discolors thoughts and deeds.

Jealousy gripped Vivie Bowen and she suffered. After all, what did she know of Glen Mellish? Who was he? His father had been an artist, he himself had painted a little. An American with the ingratiating manners of a Latin. She did not know his profession, where he lived, even where he was stopping. She only loved him. That girl might be his *fiancée*. He might be married; toying with *her*, laughing at her obvious infatuation.

An hour of bitter self-reproach, of hurt vanity, of acute pain. Then common sense came to her rescue. He had offered her friendship, nothing more. What right had she to demand he see no other woman? What right had she even to care? That friendship was the most beautiful thing ever given her, and she had been about to destroy it.

Nine o'clock the following morning found her in Boboli Gardens as usual, a little paler, her mouth a trifle more wistful, but with a smile for the young man as he came toward her. Mellish carried a copy of Browning's poems under his arm, and as he seated himself beside her on the stone bench, he opened the book.

"I've been intending to bring this along every day," he said, "there's something here that reminds me so much of you—I wonder if you know it."

Had he seen her last night? Would he speak of it? Vivie's hand trembled as she brushed a twig from her skirt.

Slowly, dreamily he read:

"Where is the use of lips' red charm
The heaven of hair, the pride of brow
And the blood that blues the inside arm,
Unless we turn as the soul knows how
The earthly gift to an end divine—"

"'Unless we turn as the soul knows how, the earthly gift to an end di-

vine,'" Vivie repeated after him. "And I—you're reminded of me—with that? That's the greatest compliment I was ever paid."

He closed the book and placed one hand on hers that rested on the bench beside him.

"Vivie," he said huskily, "there's heaven in your hair. As an artist I've adored it since that day I saw you on the train. You have beautiful features. Your mouth, your delicate nose, your fragile little white hands, your slender body—they've all appealed to me as anything beautiful appeals. But the real you, Vivie, I love you—your soul!"

She did not answer. She was incapable of doing so. She seemed to be floating. The velvety moss at her feet rolled toward her and receded. She felt his fingers relax and his arm encircling her shoulders, felt his cheek against hers; then quite suddenly her eyes filled with tears, blinding her. Her heart seemed to stand still, everything to grow black.

"Vivie, you aren't crying! Why, Vivie!"

"It's all just as I've dreamed," she sobbed. "You—your love—this garden—Italy. It's so beautiful I can't stand it."

He gathered her close in his arms, sought her warm full lips and kissed her until she laughed through her tears.

"I love you! I love you," he whispered. "I love you."

Rapture soared through the girl as she felt his dear nearness. She snuggled closer.

The episode of the night before was forgotten. After all, what did it matter? Glen loved her. She, who had been grateful for his friendship, had won his love. When Mrs. Craven sailed for America she would sail alone, for Vivie would remain in Italy to become the bride of the man she adored!

CHAPTER V

BRAVELY she risked the widow's displeasure and lunched with her lover in a quaint little tea shop not far from where Dante was born. They kissed and separated under the Loggia. Vivie, so happy she seemed to be dancing on air, walked briskly back to the hotel.

The door of Mrs. Craven's room was ajar. Vivie knocked timidly, then entered. To her astonishment she saw her companion on her knees before an open steamer trunk.

Dresses, lingerie, coats and hats were scattered pell-mell about the room. A shoe bag, overflowing with satin and lizard-skin pumps filled one chair. Souvenirs, books, leather bags, pieces of alabaster and laces crowded another.

The widow, tired and perspiring, her blond hair disheveled, struggled to her feet and frowned petulantly at Vivie's entrance.

"Well, it's about time you got here!" she snapped. "Where on earth have you been?"

Vivie scarcely heard the question. The open trunk, the suitcase and wardrobe flung about could mean but one thing, Mrs. Craven anticipated departure.

"What are you doing?" she gasped.

"Packing! We're going to Venice to-night."

"What?"

"I'm sick of this place, with its rain and ugly buildings and stuffy artists. I can't see what there is in Florence to rave about. Nobody with any style in the whole city. I've learned that the

really smart place to visit is the Lido and—"

"Who told you?" Vivie interrupted, her heart beating so hard it smothered her.

"A perfectly charming gentleman I met at luncheon. He and his sister are going to Venice to-night and invited me to accompany them."

"To-night!" Vivie dropped on the bed, unable to stand.

"What's the matter with you?" The widow looked at her sharply. "You knew I intended to travel. Heaven knows I've stayed here long enough. I don't suppose there's a woman in the Literary Club knows as much about Florence as I do now. Yes, we're going to-night."

"But isn't that awfully sudden? Wouldn't to-morrow be better? You know sleepers—on the Continent—"

Vivie was thinking desperately. If she left Florence to-night, how could she let Glen know of her departure—where she was going? Why, oh why hadn't she asked him where he was stopping, asked him his telephone number? If she weren't at Boboli Gardens in the morning to meet him, what would he think? Suppose she should never see him again?

Oh, God, to have just grasped happiness in her eager hands, and to see it slipping out of them again. She couldn't go away without seeing him, without telling him where to find her!

If he had definitely asked her to marry him, nothing could drag her away from Florence. She could go to him and tell him of Mrs. Craven's sudden decision, and suggest that they marry at once.

But he hadn't said, "Be my wife." He had only repeated a hundred times that he loved her, that his love had been born at their first meeting; that always,

He leaned nearer. "Vivie, there's Heaven in your hair. Vivie, I love you!"

so long as he lived, he would worship her. Words equivalent to a proposal of marriage, but not definite enough for Vivie to toss aside an assured position, to risk her future without funds, to say she would not leave the city. No, she couldn't do that.

She must get word to Glen Mellish. How? There were hundreds of little and big hotels in the city. She couldn't telephone them all. But to go away, perhaps never see him again. Would he understand? Would he realize that something unforeseen prevented her joining him?

IN a daze she began to help Mrs. Craven pack. Her fingers were numb and clumsy. She felt shivery and cold as though she were going to be ill. If she hurried the work might be completed in time for her to go back to Boboli Gardens before it closed. There was a chance he had returned there to live over their hour of love. She might find him.

Oh, God! She had to see him!

Three. Four. Five. Mrs. Craven suggested tea. Vivie did not answer. Boboli was closed!

"I'm dizzy," she said. "May I step outside for a moment?"

"You need something to eat. That's what's the matter, I'll bet. You hung around that cold Uffizi Gallery and went without luncheon. Sit down and I'll order some sandwiches."

"No! No!" Vivie protested. "No, please!"

But sandwiches and tea arrived.

Too late to go out now. Too late to hope she might meet him in a piazza or on a bridge. Too late to telephone all the hotels in the city. Too late!

It was after six when the widow dismissed her with the admonition to hurry with her own suitcases. In her room alone Vivie gave way to the tears that had been close to the surface for hours.

Frantic, in an absolute panic of indecision, she paced the floor, wringing her hands and sobbing like a little hurt child. Then suddenly the thing to do came to her. She would write him and leave the letter with the hotel concierge to deliver. Surely, if she failed to appear for several days, he would know something had happened. He loved her, he trusted her. He knew she loved him. Pride would not keep him away. He would try to find her.

She dashed cold water over her swollen eyes and began to write:

GLEN, DEAREST:

I shall will with every atom of me that you call at the hotel and get this letter. Mrs. Craven is determined that we leave for Venice to-night. I have no way of reaching you to say good-by. Not good-by, darling—for you must follow us.

I don't know where we shall stop, but you will find me. You must! Every minute will be a day until I know you've gotten this; every hour a century until I see you again. I love you. VIVIE.

She never quite knew how the time passed after the letter was addressed and sealed, until the porters came for their luggage and they were hustled into a taxi.

Somehow she managed to pack her belongings, nibble at a dinner she did not taste, and give coherent answers to Mrs. Craven's chatter, but the real Vivie was in an Italian garden, on a stone bench with her hands clasped in warm masculine fingers, and her ears drinking in words of love that found an answering melody in her ardent heart.

"There's Mr. Adams!" chirped Mrs. Craven as they alighted from the taxi at the station. "He has our reserva-

tions! Vivie, isn't he divine? Did you ever see any one so handsome?"

Vivie would not have recalled the tall slender man who approached them, a bland smile on his swarthy face, but his companion, a woman almost as tall, with shingled ink-black hair and languid sea green eyes, she recognized instantly.

They were the couple who had occupied the compartment from Naples alone, and had left the train at Rome. Distinguished, beautifully gowned, aristocratic, she wondered why they had unbent to cultivate the acquaintance of stupid little Mrs. Craven, since they had so plainly resented her own intrusion that day.

"My companion, Miss Bowen." The widow fluttered. "Mrs. Drake—Mr. Adams."

The man's eyes, green like his sister's, showed no recognition, but Mrs. Drake smiled cordially, saying as she extended her hand: "I've seen Miss Bowen before."

"Yes," Vivie said simply. "On the train."

"Yes, I remember, but I've seen you twice since."

"Really?" Vivie was surprised.

Mrs. Drake's thin scarlet lips twitched ever so slightly. "You didn't see me, you were too interested in Lord Dunsford, but I was in Boboli Gardens two days ago—and in the Uffizi when you were."

"Lord Dunsford!" Vivie's voice shook despite her effort to control it.

"Oh, yes. He and Lady Dunsford are staying at the Excelsior Italia where Bob and I were. I don't know him personally, but—"

"Neither do I know any Lord Dunsford," Vivie said defiantly.

Lord Dunsford!

Mrs. Drake laughed, a laugh that made Vivie want to shriek with the sudden blinding revelation of what it portended.

"Don't fence, my dear. Of course you do. Don't forget I saw you. I'm sorry if I've betrayed your little secret, but one could not be mistaken in *him*. Lord Dunsford is unusual in appearance, to say the least."

TO BE CONTINUED

Shrine

SOME must have an altar
With smoking fire
To offer up to Heaven
Their heart's desire.

Some must have a temple
Where steeples chime
To mark their deep devotion
In measured time.

For me—my grateful anthems
Will always rise
To God, while love is filling
Your lighted eyes.

—*Marie Williams Vandegrift.*

He took her in his arms with a swift, hungry motion and pressed his lips upon her soft red ones in a long hard kiss

Her Stolen Thrill

She thought she wanted dangerous thrills but playing with fire taught her the value of true love

By DEBRA APPELSON

A ROLLING stretch of golden beach, upon which danced tiny wavelets of foamy white. And above, the sky, looking like a huge inverted bowl of blue. A picture to delight the human eye.

But Candace Morrow lifted dreamy gray eyes from the book she was reading and frowned slightly at the beautiful scene before her. Not that it displeased her, only that her eyes were unseeing. Rather, they tried to pierce the gossamer veil before her. She wanted to picture sturdy Owen Carr, hero of the novel she had just completed.

A tremulous sigh shook her slender body. Oh! To love and be loved like that! How come she had so misjudged the opposite sex, had always looked with such contempt upon any male over thirty? Any one crossing that line had seemed ancient to her nineteen years upon this earth.

That was all changed now. She had come to know this Owen Carr well. Though he crossed the line at forty, yet he had galloped through pages of thwarted love at a gallant pace. With tanned face, its brown accentuated by slightly graying hair, he scornfully shoved aside Youth that persisted in his way.

No, never would she be the same again. There would be no proud tossing of her curly blond head as she strolled along with Chuck Nevers by her side. She would let envious ones have him. Perhaps that cat—the sloe-eyed hussy. If Mercedes Flood was a day, she was all of twenty-five. Well, if she wanted babies to raise, she could start on the twenty-three-year-old Chuck.

Candace sat up straight in the swinging hammock, and raised a slender shoulder. "It is just as well, Chuck Nevers. We were never meant for each other," she muttered haughtily, her crescent-shaped eyebrows drawing together in a frown.

"Who takes my name in vain?"

There before her stood Chuck Nevers, a grin on his tanned face, a mischievous twinkle in his brown eyes.

Startled, Candace placed a tiny hand above the region of her heart, but remained calm in speech.

"You don't have to scare the wits out of me that way, Chuck Nevers," she answered quietly.

"Cripes, I've been standing here five minutes without your even noticing me. Explanation yourself, woman."

"Is it necessary to share my most intimate thoughts with you? Ye gods, I do enough of that with the family."

"Aw, don't be a crab, Candace. I just watched you gesticulating like an actress. Are you practicing for a dance, a play, or what have you?"

"Don't be a sil," answered Candace with a weary shake of her head. "I was only thinking."

"Save that for some week day. I come down to Pebble Beach for frivolous week-ends. This sure is a peach of a day, and the bunch is waiting for you at Cissy's. Come now, snap out of it, woman. Let's step on it."

She smiled faintly. "I'm really not in the mood, Chuck, dear. You run along and enjoy yourself like a dear boy."

"Well, I'll be—" His voice barked at her. "You make me sick, acting as though you were in a trance. Good-by!"

He turned and ran down the few steps that led to the sidepath. She heard the roar of his car as it sped down the road behind the house. Childish temper, that was all, she concluded sagely.

Now, how could Owen Carr have overcome stupendous obstacles in such manner? Forty was certainly not old, that she had learned. Of course, with her father it was different. Dad was forty-three, but when one is a father, and rather short and rotund in appearance, scat with romance.

Candace sighed deeply, and stirred around in the hammock. Come to think of it, the day was rather pretty. Her novel had been so fascinating she hadn't noticed it. Too much reading, perhaps. A dip in the cool green sea would refresh her. She wondered what the gang was doing. Gay voices rose above the soft purl of waves. And above all, the high shriek of Mercedes Flood. She grimaced.

"I'll just meander over and give that young lady a little competition. She needn't think she can grab Chuck too quickly."

A flash, and Candace was upstairs in

her bedroom. It took but a second to disrobe. She stood before the mirror buttoning the strap of her extremely short blue swimming suit. With a hum on her lips, she slipped into her colorful beach pyjamas. Then, with a nod of approval at her slim reflection in the mirror, dashed out of the room.

CISSY FIELD'S private beach was swarming with people. Gay umbrellas, like mushrooms, dotted the entire place. Slender, boyish forms in scanty bathing suits dashed back and forth. One could hardly tell which were boys. Her gang greeted Candace with the usual insolent nonchalance peculiar to them. Perhaps it was considered old-fashioned to be effusive in your greetings.

She wondered where Chuck was. She looked out at the float bobbing up and down in sun-kissed waters. There were several figures on it.

A slender youth in abbreviated trunks stood before her, grinning. "Well, if it isn't Candy Kid, you ol' son-of-a-gun. Was your heavy sugar a wash-out?"

Candace shoved the youth aside impatiently, and moved on. He struck a dramatic pose, and called out:

"Hey! Hey!" *'Lover come back to me.'*"

Shouts of laughter rose upon the air. Quips at another's expense were always relished.

A plunge into cool waters. The spray of the sea was in her eyes, her nose, as she sent her slender body cleaving through the water. A friendly hand reached out from the float. She climbed up, with deep gulps of fresh air, to find herself looking into merry brown eyes. Her heart gave an extra beat. Of all the people on the crowded float, to think Chuck should have helped her out of the water. He was a dear, after all.

The slight figure in red beside him raised her head. With narrowed eyes, Candace looked into the mocking ones of Mercedes Flood. So she didn't lose much time! But she was not the victor quite yet.

"Hello, ol' fruit!" she called easily.

"Well, if it isn't the little Candy Kid!"

Then a strained silence between the two girls. It was so taut, a pin prick would have sent the two of them into an explosion of words. Words lined with sharp edges that would cut cleaner than a knife.

Finally Chuck, good-natured though he was, stirred restlessly. He sensed an invisible veil of unrest.

"Come on, girls, race you both in."

He stood up; made a clever dive into the water, Candace following close upon his heels.

Mercedes raised a slim red shoulder in contempt. Then, with a lazy and languorous motion, she rolled over to face an eager youth beside her.

Forgotten was her earlier boredom. With gay abandon, Candace plunged into the hilarious crowd. She was triumphant with Chuck close beside her. No, she wasn't giving him up quite yet. One might commune with sedate thoughts, yet enjoy a sportive occasion. She had almost missed this one by becoming too serious.

For Cissy Field was not one to go halfway. In a flash, she had coaxed the gang into staying for the evening. Ah! The news whizzed by. A swimming party, then dancing by moonlight. She would transport an orchestra from a near-by town. She set servants flying with sharp, precise commands. No one was to go home to dress. Beach pyjamas, old jeans, bathrobes, anything

went. To be fashionable, you did not resist the urge to go *deshabille.*

And in careless abandon they lounged around the hall of the big house, later flocking to the beach in the pearly twilight. Here vast iron pots were set up on cranes to cook tempting delicacies. Boiling corn on the cob, the inimitable "hot dog" and fragrant coffee were soon ready for the hungry mob. All set to with appetites made more avid by their swimming and romping. The dark cover of night descended upon joyous youth *en fête.*

Then the house, becoming suddenly ablaze with lights, tempted them. Lanterns had been run along the open balcony that faced the wide stretch of sandy beach. Three Hawaiians appeared, summoned by the magic hand of Cissy, and strummed crooning tunes on their guitars. A huge yellow moon drenched the entire scene with silvery light. Shrill laughter and high voices became musical in the moonlight. Figures in ludicrous garments became dancers in masquerade costume. Glamor waved a magic wand.

"Isn't it all marvelous, Chuck?" breathed Candace softly. It had been her dance with him, as most of them had been. Too much romance in this dreamy night to trust him away from her side.

"Just great, Candace." But under his breath, he murmured the word "beloved" to himself. For he was looking right into the starry eyes of the girl who meant everything in the world to him. A warm glow stole over him. Gone was the uneasy feeling he had experienced at her peculiar behavior that afternoon.

Cissy Field dashed through the crowd. She stopped and pulled them aside.

"Stingy thing," she said accusingly to Candace. "Why didn't you share the exciting news with your old pals?"

"What are you talking about? You tight, or something?"

Cissy grimaced. "Oh, I suppose you'll be surprised. Yes, you will—not."

"Cross my heart, hope to die, if I'm not surprised," chanted Candace, in an endeavor to assuage the girl's volcanic outburst.

"Don't be ridic, also childish. Here I am all thrilled, and you acting like a ninny."

"Well, spill it out, Cissy," interrupted Chuck, with impatience, "before we all die of suspense."

"Honest, Candace, don't you know?" Then, seeing Candace shake her head in puzzled fashion, Cissy went on: "That famous artist from Carmel—you know—Ronald Barry, has come to Pebble Beach for the season. Taken the Dover house next door to you. Now say the gods haven't favored you, lucky che-ild."

"Good night, is that all?" answered Chuck, in a disgusted tone. He swung Candace away from the other girl, back into the midst of swaying couples. His arm tightened about her.

Candace smiled up at him. "Manstruck, that kid is." For she had forgotten her own silent romance of the afternoon. Otherwise, the lure of the silver-tipped night might have been lost on her.

As it happened, that lure remained with her the rest of the evening, and sent her to sleep with a dreamy smile playing around her soft red mouth. She had promised the whole of the next day to Chuck. They would take a long drive, perhaps to Del Monte, and a swim there in the Roman pool. Then perhaps on the way home stop at the

Shack for fried chicken and a few dances.

NO wonder, therefore, that Candace had completely forgotten about her new neighbor. It was Monday morning before she thought of him at all. The long week stretched out ahead of her like a weary road. Chuck, with most of the boys, had returned to San Francisco on the early train, not to return until the next week-end for another round of pleasure. Of course, there were the girls to swim and golf around with. But one wanted something else.

Candace sat in the cheerful breakfast room. Across the table, mother smiled cheerfully at her.

"Why is every one so thrilled about Ronald Barry, mother?" asked the girl suddenly, as Cissy's words came to mind. "What's he like, anyhow?"

"Mr. Barry is somewhere around forty years of age, my dear. Quite fascinating, too, I should say. I met him at Los Angeles some time ago."

"Piffle. I just bet he's short, fat and uninteresting."

Candace went for a little stroll with her mother, because there was nothing else to do, pausing a moment in front of Mr. Barry's new summer residence.

Just then Mr. Barry himself appeared, dripping from a swim, causing the girl to stare in round-eyed wonderment and to forget her discontent.

For this was no ordinary mortal. Rather, the well-known figure of Owen Carr walking out of the pages of her last novel. The same stalwart figure, the same dark hair slightly tinged with gray. And his skin. Darker than any she had ever seen, except when his swimming suit moved unexpectedly. Then it was a clear golden color.

He was not in the least embarrassed at his lack of street clothes. Slipping into a bathrobe, he invited Candace and her mother to be seated, then he carelessly slid into a wicker chair next to the girl.

"I do believe in picking charming neighbors," he said, his dark eyes acknowledging with a keen glance Mrs. Morrow's introduction of her daughter. His voice, low and deep, thrilled every fiber in Candace's body. Only to sit and bask in this wonder man's charming smile!

What a pity Mrs. Morrow did not care for swimming. It was so exhilarating. Perhaps this little lady would keep him company? Nine o'clock tomorrow morning? Ah! That would be splendid. One so charming need not fear losing any beauty sleep.

To Candace it seemed the time would never pass. Every minute seemed an hour, every hour a day. But finally the day and then the night passed, as they usually do. Almost on the dot Candace, a charming figure in her blue bathing suit, ran out to meet the waiting Mr. Barry.

Admiring gleams leaped in his dark eyes and thrilled her. They plunged through white-lacey breakers and swam beyond to the cool green ocean. A run along the glistening, sloping beach, ever being washed away by the curling waves, then, seeking the higher sun-kissed sand, the couple threw themselves down to bake in its warmth. Candace felt the man's searching gaze pass quickly over her. It caused the warm blood to rush to her face.

"My dear, you are such a lovely child. I must paint you some time just as you are."

She pouted. "Really I am not such a child as you think. I am tired of being thought that. Nobody understands the workings of my mind."

A grave smile played around twitching lips. "Ah, but I do."

Waves of happiness swept over the girl. She sighed blissfully. It was so marvelous to be understood at last. They would get along famously. And to think he offered to paint her. She could see the envy of Cissy, Mercedes and the others.

"One does get so tired of the youngsters around here," she remarked. "They hardly ever talk of anything sensible."

"You do not think me old then?"

"Oh, Mr. Barry, how ridiculous to talk that way! Certainly not! Yet you have had the experience of life that I seek."

"Candace—if I may?" At her nod of approval, he continued: "You are very refreshing. Youth usually looks with contempt upon any one older. But it is our Freud who instructs us to be interested in our years. We must not suppress ourselves—rather give vent to our inner feelings if they give us happiness. Of course, my life is not easy. One gets very lonesome at times." His voice broke on a sigh.

She understood and yearned to comfort him.

Enthralled, she listened further to the pearls of wisdom that fell from the lips of this fascinating man. Owen Carr himself could not have been more brave and more interesting.

Candace had been reborn to a new world. There was something now to live for. And the feverish, clean love of Chuck Nevers lay forgotten in a tiny corner of her groping mind.

Several days later, she posed for the famous artist. Further down the sandy stretch of beach they found a rocky cove. Perched on a bowlder, with bare legs dangling, Candace was a charming picture in her bathing suit. This effect was not lost upon Ronald Barry, expert in beautiful women. He stood by his easel studying her through narrowed eyes.

"Very good," he said gravely.

Candace laughed gleefully and tossed back her curly head. Thus she missed the peculiar twitch at the corner of his lips. However, it might have meant nothing to her at the time.

THE week passed by on happy wings. The painting progressed very slowly, but it was so pleasant that Candace did not begrudge the time. She stretched cramped muscles under his quizzical gaze. It challenged him one day to put away brushes and go over to her rocky pedestal.

"What a perfect model you have made. You deserve a holiday."

"How spiffy," laughed Candace, clapping her hands in childish glee.

"Yes. To-morrow is Saturday. How about a drive to Del Monte?"

"Too bad mother is going to the city; she would enjoy going with us."

He seemed lost in thought. "Seems as if a twosome will be forced on us."

"I guess we can manage somehow," answered Candace, in an easy voice.

But underneath the blue swimming suit, a young heart raced ahead of its usual normal rhythm. Pshaw! Inwardly, she laughed away the nervous fear that persisted in sweeping through her. That was a chance in a lifetime. Something surely for the girls to crow over. For wasn't Ronald Barry famous the world over? And hadn't he been a more perfect gentleman than half the boys she traveled with? So what harm if she spent a pleasant day with him? Going out with a middle-aged man of the world in the country was different than going with him to the theater in the city.

Of course, there was Chuck to disappoint. He was looking forward to Saturday afternoon and Sunday in her company. Would he seek Mercedes Flood? A slight twinge of resentment at this. But Candace couldn't give up such pleasant company, no, not even for Chuck. He seemed so young in comparison with this worldly teacher.

And there was a certain spice added to your life by a little daring. One could go to a certain point, and yet not venture beyond. Silly of every one to consider her such a child. As if she didn't know just how far to go.

There was also Ronald to consider. He wasn't happy, that she knew. There were sad gleams in his dark eyes. Yes, she must consider this in giving up a little of her time to him.

Of course, there would naturally be mother's objections. But the girl awoke Saturday morning, to find that her mother had already left. Candace was relieved, yet did not feel entirely free in her emotions. Somehow, she would have enjoyed arguing with her mother about her expedition with Ronald. There was more tang when you fought for things.

But seated in the huge shining roadster beside Ronald she forgot all petty trifles. Ahead of them stretched the road smooth and shining like a silver ribbon; around them gleamed a perfect morning.

She huddled close on soft cushions and closed her eyes in ecstasy. The murmur of singing tires was a lullaby. She forced back heavy lids, to find his gaze upon her.

"Sleeping beauty. But you should have awaited the prince's kiss for awakening."

Candace sat up straight and flirted with him out of the corner of her eye. "Well, why be so slow then?"

"My error, your score," he admitted ruefully. "But the day is not done as yet."

She shivered delightfully with expectancy. Would he make love to her to-day? So far, he had hardly touched her hand. She wanted him to take her in his strong arms, his somber gaze burning into her, and feel his lips upon hers. Then she would know life, wouldn't she?

But there was a long drive ahead. Ronald seemed able to attend to only one thing at a time, so Candace remained quiet beside him.

They were almost at Del Monte. Ronald swerved the big machine off the main road, and it came to rest under a huge, inviting redwood. He put his arms around Candace with a swift, hungry motion, and pressed his lips upon her soft red ones in a long, hard kiss. For a moment she lay still and passive.

Then she drew away from his embrace, shivering although it wasn't cold. Why? She felt her whole being torn in a whirlpool of emotions. Brought to a pitch where she had desired that kiss, she could not understand her reaction to it—and to Ronald. It was like wanting to sob at your mother's knee when you found out there was no Santa Claus.

For in a flash she had read the man's character in his kiss. Passion, in its fiery state burned through him. She had thought it respect and admiration for her.

She drew a sharp breath. What to do? Premonition told her of an avalanche of reproach should she ask him to turn back. She must go on, until chance afforded an opportunity to use her wits. But, oh, he must not kiss her again!

Candace laughed nervously, and

pouted red lips. "Let's hurry. I am getting starved."

"Oh, all right, my dear," he answered good-naturedly. "I can't very well have a starving child on my hands."

He started the engine and sent it roaring back on to the highway. Soon they reached the low, white hotel building set deep in green forests. Over to the right was the miniature Roman bathing pool, swarming with people. Gay chatter filled the warm, still air.

Ronald turned a dark, frowning face. "I have a good mind to drive on to Carmel. We've plenty of time. And I could get some things on the way for a snack."

AN agony of indecision swept through Candace. To face the eager, lip-smacking crowd at Del Monte, or to take a chance on proceeding further with him alone? She would be getting further away, and the chances of evading him slimmer.

She just couldn't understand herself. This man had meant everything to her this morning. In fact, she could have gone to the end of the world with him then. What then? It was with his kiss that she had experienced an awful sense of revulsion, an overwhelming conviction she had been leading him up to that, and that she had made a mistake.

She was only a second rate sport. She had started something she couldn't —or rather, didn't want to—finish. And what was more difficult was trying to tell him so.

Candace opened the door of the roadster and jumped out. "Let's stay here for awhile, anyway," she laughed at him. "I'm sure we'll know just oodles of people, and we can have a swim later."

Ronald shrugged indecisively. He was accustomed to having his wishes carried out. With a frown still on his face, he followed her up the few steps of the hotel. They would have luncheon on the wide terrace that flanked the low building.

With a sweet smile, Candace excused herself. "Just for a few minutes," she said graciously. "I must be a sight after that drive. You don't mind waiting until I powder my nose?"

"You're pretty as a picture now, Candace. But I know you women; always ready to primp at a moment's provocation. Run along, dear, and I'll wait for you here."

As luck would have it, she had to run into Nancy Held, whose sharp eyes spied her entering the dressing room. Nancy held out arms that one could hardly avoid.

"Fawncy meeting you here, Candace, my dear." She had just returned from a Boston finishing school, and greatly affected the English accent.

Inwardly, Candace writhed with burning agitation, but there was no escaping the viselike hold upon her.

"I'm just down for the day, Nancy. How are you? And are you here for the week-end?" The words tumbled from her mouth with speed. If only she could keep the other girl from asking questions. For Nancy relished a morsel of scandal, enjoyed rolling it around on her tongue.

There was nothing wrong in Candace's outing. But Nancy would ask questions and want the whys and wherefores of everything. She would surely construe something unpleasant for her victim's ears.

Candace went on nonchalantly powdering her face, outlining with carmine her cupid's lips, and tucking at stray tendrils. The other girl continued

chatting, unaware that her listener was almost ready to commit murder.

If ever there was a leech, it was Nancy Held. Candace despaired of losing her. She might just as well go out now, and be hanged. If only some one would call Nancy—but the two had the room to themselves.

"Coming out now?" asked Candace, sauntering toward the door, hoping against hope. But the fates were against her this time.

With a nod, Nancy took hold of her arm and they walked out to the terrace. But there was no Ronald to greet them. Candace's eyes grew round with wonderment, and a prayer was on her lip for at least a moment's respite as she gazed around her.

"Oh, look who's over there." Nancy's voice had awe in it. "That handsome artist, Ronald Barry. Hot dog! With his latest flame, Vera Adams."

Her face drained of every bit of color, Candace stared at the attractive couple earnestly talking in the shade of a huge redwood. Miss Adams was certainly beautiful, with dark hair and vivid coloring. She was gazing at Ronald angrily.

"His latest flame?" asked Candace in a small voice.

"Yes, didn't you know? Haven't you met him yet?"

Candace shook her head, but could not trust herself to reply. She must get away from this girl, and do something.

"Listen, Nancy, you wait here. I have to look up my crowd, and we'll be back here," she said hurriedly. But Nancy had eyes only for the pair under the tree and, if she heard Candace, made no sign.

Now, if she could remember quickly where they had left the car. For she was going to act, and do it p. d. q. Luck, for once, was with her. The machine wasn't locked, and there was plenty leeway to back it out. With her whole body trembling, Candace turned on the ignition, and soon felt the car throbbing beneath her.

There was just a chance that she could escape unseen. She did not look back. Not until she felt herself racing down the clear highway did she allow her turmoiled mind to unleash itself. What a green little kid he must have thought her, or else that she was very wise.

Now she saw what his motive was. Undoubtedly he had thought her "modern," perhaps like his Vera Adams—one ready to go through to the end. And here she was racing home in a stolen car—just a poor sport.

It was only when she thought of the suave Ronald finding both her and his car gone that laughter bubbled to her lips. She had thought him quiet, poised, but now she realized the hidden depths of this man. Well, he would have to get home any old way, but how would she ever face him? She would plead something urgent.

And then the specter of Chuck arose before her straining vision. What a fool she had been. Lost him into the bargain. It would serve her right if he should turn her down cold this time for Mercedes Flood.

She had left a message with the maid to give him when he called. Then, scouting around, he would learn of her silly behavior of the past week, for now she realized how silly she had been.

A weary girl walked around to the side of her house. She had left Barry's car in front of his place. All she wanted was the comfortable hammock out on the balcony, where she might collect her tired thoughts.

She mounted the few steps from the

path, to stand there with gaping mouth. For there, sound asleep in the hammock, lay Chuck. Oh! God was good. Somehow Chuck must have learned of her predicament—he was here waiting for her. She leaned over and pressed a soft kiss on the lips of the sleeping boy.

Chuck sat upright. Quickly his arms reached and pulled her into the hammock beside him. He showered her with kisses until, breathless, she pushed him away.

He shook his head, grinning at her. "You little son-of-a-gun!"

"Oh, Chuck, keep on swearing at me. It feels so good, after what I've been through."

Breathlessly she poured forth the details, until he had learned the whole story.

"I've been such a fool. It was that old novel did it. I'll never read another! Why do they print such trash when it isn't true?"

"So you thought any one over forty was more fascinating than your boy friend? Well, just start right in accepting me as being old enough, because I'm taking care of you from now on. You'll have to wait until I'm forty to vamp me."

"No, I'm all through with vamping. I want only you the rest of my life."

"Well spoken," agreed Chuck.

And he went on kissing her.

Absent Lover

I WANT a lover bold;
I want a lover true;
But more than both of these I want
Just you.

I want a fond caress,
A warm kiss on my cheek;
But more than this I want to hear
You speak.

Irene Handley Beard

Her eyes dropped before his, but in that moment she had caught a glimpse of something that thrilled her with rapture

The Paper Doll Bride

She wanted a wedding, but not a husband!

By MARJORIE GLEYRE

LUCIA heard the postman's whistle and leaned out the window of her little rose and white bedroom to see whether he was stopping at the house. But an awning in front of the church down the street attracted her attention and immediately the postman was forgotten. That awning meant a wedding! Lucia leaned out at a perilous angle to watch, with soft brown eyes that nearly popped out of her head. Gripping the sill firmly and holding her breath lest she lose her balance, she stared enthralled. There were empty cars lined up on both sides of the street so the wedding was probably taking place then and there. Oh! for a glimpse of the bride! She wanted

that with an intensity that amounted almost to a passion.

Weddings were her greatest delight. Perhaps because of her yearning to figure as a bride herself—a yearning which she feared was not to be fulfilled. One by one her friends were getting married; time and again she served as bridesmaid; but that seemed to be the nearest she could get to the altar. Shy Lucia with her quiet charm which hid itself under a cloak of indifference when she wished most to show it! She wished so much to appear desirable to the boys that it made her self-conscious and awkward. So she attended every wedding she could, observing the bridal pair, especially the bride, with covetous longing and getting a vicarious thrill.

As she looked, it occurred to her that if she hurried she might get down to the church before the ceremony was over and get a look at the bride as she came out. Hastily drawing in her head she grabbed up her hat and ran downstairs. At the door of the living room her mother stopped her.

"Lucia," she said cheerily, "I've got a young man for you!"

Lucia looked at her with impatient interest. If only it were a young man *for her*. But one or another of the other girls always got the young men sooner or later—and anyway, she did not want to stop now for fear of missing the bride.

"Who is it?" she queried, taking a step toward the door.

"The son of dad's old friend, Wilbur Greene. Wilbur is sending his son here to establish an agency—you know he has a big carpet factory. And he wants us to be nice to him when—"

"Tell me all about it at dinner," called Lucia, opening the front door. "I must run now—wedding up street—want to see the bride."

She sped up the street and reached the church just as the guests were beginning to come out. With rosy mouth parted and breath short with excitement she watched until the way was cleared and out came the bride and groom. A long rapturous sigh escaped her. How lovely the bride looked! Bridal dresses were always so beautiful—so becoming. She turned away with the picture still before her, but the face of the bride was not that of a stranger—in her imagination it was her own round, wistful face that was framed by the bridal veil!

She was rapt in this mental vision when the persistent honking of an auto horn roused her. She turned to see what the hubbub was about. A car was drawing up to the curb near her and the man in it was beckoning. But he could not be beckoning to her—no one ever did—no one ever tried to pick her up. However, a covert glance around showed her that the block was deserted save for herself—and the driver of the car was still beckoning. A feeling of daring, of don't-careness swept over her. For once in her life someone had singled her out and wished to make her acquaintance. Why not embark on this adventure? The sun was reflected from the windshield in such a way that she could not see what the man looked like. But curiosity gaining over timidity, she let her feet, grown suddenly bold, carry her over to the car.

"How d'ye do, Miss Carlton!" the man greeted her. "Just thought perhaps I could give you a lift."

"Th—thank you," stuttered Lucia, in cold surprise, recognizing the man as the father of one of the children in her Sunday School class. "It's kind of you—but I'm going right home."

As the car drove off she smiled a

bitter smile at her own expense. It was the same old story. The idea of thinking a stranger could be interested by just seeing her, when she couldn't even win one of the boys she knew! The vision of the bride with *her* face quite, quite faded!

AT dinner that evening the conversation turned to young Walter Greene. Both her father and her mother seemed pleasantly excited about his advent. Her dad related many recollections of his college days with Wilbur Greene.

"If young Walter is half the man his dad was he's an up-and-comer!" he said enthusiastically. "Wilbur made loads of money so I imagine the boy is pretty well fixed and doesn't have to work unless he wants to; I'm glad to see that he does seem to want to."

"Let's see," mused Mrs. Carlton, "if he's only recently out of college he must be about twenty-two or three." She turned to Lucia with an encouraging smile, "Just a nice age for you, dear."

"Listen to mother's air castles!" laughed dad, and then added significantly, "—if Lucia would try not to be so particular!"

Lucia blushed warmly. Did dad really think it was because she was too particular, or was he just being sweet?"

"Ha-ha!" he teased. "Look at the girl blush!"

Her mother looked at her thoughtfully. "It's becoming," she averred. "Hop up and look at yourself in the glass, Lucia, and then get yourself some rouge just that shade."

Lucia obediently looked at herself in the mirror. "When do we see this marvelous young man?" she queried carelessly, but her heart had begun to swell with hopeful anticipation.

"In about a week," answered her mother. "I'm writing to tell him to come directly to us and stay a week or two until he can get satisfactorily located."

"That'll give you first shot at him, Luce," said Mr. Carlton, humorously.

"Dad!" she remonstrated, blushing again.

But when she thought it over alone she confessed to herself that she was glad young Walter Greene was coming to them before he met any other people in town. It gave her a head start, and just this once maybe she would succeed. She tightened her jaw with determination to capture this young man's interest so that when he met the other girls it would not matter to her—that is, of course, if she liked him. She was woefully doubtful of her power to interest him, but she vowed that she would do her very, very best—because she might never get another chance like this one. It would be so wonderful to have a boy friend of her very own—and perhaps— The vision of the bride recurred to her and now it wore her face once more!

Her mother seemed to sense Lucia's plan and tacitly abetted it.

"It's time you had some new clothes," she suggested. "And I want you to get something a little nicer than usual."

"My allowance won't stretch that far," objected the girl, though her eyes lit up at the prospect.

"I'll pay half," her mother offered generously. "And I'm going shopping with you. When you go alone you pick out such conservative things that they hardly look smart."

She was as good as her word. And before the week was out Lucia had a new wardrobe of bright, attractive things. When her mother watched her

trying them on she sighed regretfully and said, "Why didn't I do this long ago, instead of letting you dress yourself like a little mouse?"

"I don't like to be conspicuous," murmured Lucia, but with the mirror in front of her she could not help seeing that she looked as pretty as any of the other girls. Her mother had selected soft browns and bright blues that brought out the golden tints in her light brown hair and made her skin look delightfully creamy.

The day on which Walter Greene was expected to arrive was the date for another town wedding, when Lucia was to march up the aisle in a secondary rôle. Her bridesmaid's costume was singularly becoming to her both in style and color and she looked like a painting. During most of the ceremony she thought about Walter Greene, praying that he would be nice, praying that he would like her. She *must* make him like her; then the next wedding she figured in might be her own! Who could tell? At the mere thought of *herself* in the bridal gown marching up the aisle to the stirring music of the wedding march, to be met by the groom and have the significant band slipped on her finger, a luscious warmth swept over her. Oh! It was one of those things that are too good to be true!

To cap the climax, she caught the bridal bouquet! When the bride ran halfway upstairs, turned and threw her bouquet among the bridesmaids, there was a grand scramble accompanied by shrill laughter and excited squeals as they all tried to catch it. Lucia, hanging back shyly as usual, had suddenly found the bouquet right in her hands, though she had made no effort to get it!

"Here's the next bride!" everyone shouted, and for a few moments she was the center of attention, embarrassed but happy.

Of course she was not superstitious—only it always did seem to happen that the one catching the bouquet became the next bride! She could scarcely wait to get home and tell her parents about it. Still glowing from her triumph she burst into the living room holding the bouquet high above her head. Her eyes sparkled and the animated color in her cheeks reflected the coral tint of her frock.

"Look, folks! I caught the bridal bouquet!" she caroled, before she noticed that there was a stranger present.

Then she paused, startled, feeling very foolish and awkward.

She little knew what a lovely colorful picture she presented as she stood in the doorway which made a frame for her. But the young man was not slow to appreciate it and stared with such frank admiration that she had to drop her eyes before his. But in that moment she had read something there in his eyes that she had never before seen in a man's eyes—never, that is, when he was looking at her. She thrilled with the knowledge that at last she had made an impression.

"This is my daughter, Lucia," said Mrs. Carlton. "She has just been bridesmaid at a wedding."

"And how!" exclaimed Walter Greene, with perfect ease and undisguised approbation.

He stepped forward to shake hands and Lucia ventured another glance at him. She did not have to look up far to meet his eyes, for he was not tall, but he was well built and had the pleasantest face she had ever seen. Not so handsome, but there was humor in the twinkling eyes, generosity in the mouth, and determination in the square

jaw. He would do! After she saw the gorgeous car he drove and learned how easy it was for him to spend money she was more sure than ever that he would do!

THE following days were thrilling ones for Lucia. Walter was "rushing" her. She almost had to pinch herself to make sure it was real and not some beautiful dream. "If it is a dream, please don't let me wake up," was her constant prayer. Wedding bells rang persistently in her ears. She began to plan her bridal gown—very secretly, of course—but none the less seriously.

When Walter had been with them about a week one of Lucia's friends rang up to invite her to a party. The invitation, given as invitations usually were given to Lucia, revealed all too plainly her former status.

"Say, Lucia, I'm throwing a party Saturday night. I suppose everyone will pair off—you know how 'tis; so I don't know what kind of a time you'll have. But if you want to take a chance I'll try to dig up a man for you."

"Why yes, I think it would be fun," accepted Lucia, smooth as silk, though she was all a-tingle inside with the triumph of her news. "But suppose I bring my own boy friend? Will that do?"

It got around like wildfire that Lucia had a boy friend, and when she appeared with him at the party on Saturday night, she felt that they were the center of interest. She enjoyed it at first and was proud because Walter made a favorable impression; but later she had some bad moments. Several of the girls seemed to be trying to vamp him, and besides being prettier than she they were expert at flirtations.

But on the way home he took her hand in his without saying anything, and the mere pressure of his fingers said as much as words could have told her. Then he patted her hand gently, carried it to his lips, and still without speaking, pressed a fervent kiss in her palm.

Lucia knew he was falling deeply in love with her, and rejoiced. She sensed his exhilaration when he was with her; she noted how he hung on her every word, how her slightest wish was law. But strangely, she never questioned or probed her own feelings for him! It satisfied her to know he cared. All her thoughts were directed to the future, most especially that bit of the future which would include the wedding ceremony.

And truly her dreams seemed nearer and nearer to fulfilment every day, so sure was she becoming of him. So that even when he left her house at the end of two weeks to take an apartment with a couple of other fellows, she let him go without a tremor.

Then she went through an agony of suspense till she saw him again, because she began to wonder if her imagination was tricking her. They had only known each other two weeks, and that was a rather short time in which to be sure of oneself.

But as soon as she looked into his eyes the next time she saw him she was reassured. He had called up to invite her out driving that evening.

"What ages since I've seen you!" was his greeting, while his eyes feasted on hers. "I can't believe it was only day before yesterday."

"I've missed you, too," she admitted.

They drove off. Walter did not say much until, after many windings and turnings, he explained with a sheepish grin:

"I'm looking for a good place to park. I want to talk to you."

Her heart gave a bound and then began to thump almost painfully.

"Can't you talk while you're driving?" she asked as carelessly as she could.

"No. Unfortunately I'm not a one-arm driver!"

By the time he found a place Lucia was burning with expectation.

"Now," he sighed in satisfaction, having run the car up beside the road under the overhanging branches of a large shade tree. Then he suddenly slid his arm about her, drew her close and kissed her.

She was so busy thinking about how this would doubtless lead to a proposal and thus on to the wedding, that she was scarcely conscious of the kiss.

"Lucia, darling!" he breathed hotly against her cheek, "say you'll marry me—quick. I've been in torment ever since I left your house! I was going to wait a respectable length of time before saying this to you—I wanted you to have a chance to get used to having me around. But as soon as I got into the apartment I knew it was no use. It's such a waste of time and everything to take any apartment except with you— Dearest, speak to me, please!"

"Yes—yes, Walt!" gasped Lucia, almost overcome with happiness now that her moment had come. The wedding march was dinning in her ears so that she could scarcely hear what Walter was saying; but it didn't matter much, because he seemed to be repeating the same thing over and over—how he missed her, how wonderful she was, how he could never be content without her, and all of the old sweet things which are new again with each lover.

"Then you will marry me, you really *will*, my beloved?" he urged.

"Yes—when?" she smiled.

"Your dear one!" he raved on. "As soon as possible — to-morrow — to-night."

"Walter!" she remonstrated at that, drawing away to gaze at him reproachfully. "Not till next month at least. There's so much to get ready and we want to have a real pretty wedding."

"Not a big one, sweetheart," he begged. "I hate a fuss."

"Well, not big—but with all the trimmings!" she insisted, leaning a little toward him.

He took her in his arms, kissed her again and again, saying that she could have whatever she wanted even if it was a ceremony in Westminster Abbey. But Lucia was so busy planning the bridesmaids' dresses she was quite deaf to his extravagances.

During the next couple of weeks Lucia flew around busily, happily, proudly. She was to be a bride! She had planned her bridal costume down to the tiniest detail, and the most competent dressmaker in town was making it. Then there were the countless other exciting things to attend to. She was so busy she scarcely found time to see Walter!

"I'll be glad when it's over and I can see something of you," he grumbled one evening when she had kept him busy doing errands the whole time.

She hummed the wedding march and took an imaginary step or two up the aisle. Then she performed a series of ecstatic pirouettes.

"Isn't it going to be heavenly!" she cried. "And did you ever see anything as sweet as my gown? Now honestly, Walt, did you?"

"You care more about your gown than you do about me," he complained.

And neither of them suspected how near he was to the truth.

"When are we going apartment hunting?" he asked for the 'steenth time.

"Darling! Must we? I have so *much* to do—"

"Of course we must," he insisted. "We've got to have a place to stay till we're ready to build."

"Well, darling, *you* find one for us. You know so much more about such things than I do." She gave him a quick, impersonal kiss.

He took a dozen more personal kisses before saying:

"Furnished, of course. Because we don't want to buy a lot of furniture and find it isn't suitable for the house afterward."

"Whatever you say, Walt dear," she agreed, restless to get back to her own more interesting preparations.

A couple of weeks before the wedding date Walter announced he had found an apartment that seemed just about right. He wanted her to come and look it over with him before he made the final arrangements, because if it did not exactly suit her—

"But it will suit me," she replied nonchalantly.

He set his square jaw into even squarer lines and insisted on her seeing it. "It seems to me this is important enough to attend to," he said reproachfully. "Aren't you interested in the first home we will have together?"

"Yes," she replied, with a troubled air. There was something arresting about the words "home together."

SO the next afternoon Walter left his office early and took Lucia to see the apartment.

The minute they passed over the threshold something took hold of Lucia; something sinister that she could not shake off. All her delicious planning seemed threatened by this malign, unseen force.

"Here's the living room," said Walter, eagerly showing it off. "It's not very large, but honey, we won't care about parties for a while, will we? We'll have so much to learn about each other—just you and me here together!"

Lucia listened with parted lips. And found nothing to say in reply.

"There's no dining room," he continued, conducting her through the door, "but here's a cosy breakfast nook right off the kitchen, and what more could we want? Look, we can sit side by side on the bench. And save dishes," he laughed at his own joke. "We'll only need one plate, one cup, one spoon and so forth."

Again Lucia gazed at him in uncomfortable fascination. What did all this have to do with wearing a bridal dress and marching down the aisle? She had never thought of these things before. How queer it would be to be living in this place all alone with Walter!

He had pushed on to the next room. "Isn't this a swell bedroom?" he praised.

She moistened her lips with her tongue, oppressed by the significance of the room. Their bedroom! She had never thought of that before. There seemed so many things which she had not thought of that it left her dazed and chastened. She drew back a step and looked at Walter—a long, thoughtful look—perhaps the first really *seeing* look she had ever given him! And she seemed to be looking at a stranger! Did she really know this man? She had expected to be a bride—oh yes!—that was the trouble;

her mind had been entirely occupied with that aspect to the exclusion of all others. She had not considered her approaching wedding further than the altar. The realization of it as marriage had not occurred to her—now it came as an incredible shock. She would be the wife of this man—this strange man!

Walter put an arm around her and pulled her close to him. "Don't you just thrill to think of our first day in this ducky place—our first night?"

At that Lucia tore herself away from him and fled out of the apartment, down the stairs without waiting for the elevator, and tumbled into the car. Wave after wave of hot apprehension swept over her. She hid burning cheeks in her hands.

Walter came panting to the car after her. "What's the matter?" he demanded, pale with worriment.

"I feel ill—please take me home."

"Perhaps we'd better stop and see a doctor?" he suggested anxiously.

"No—I want to get home."

She sank back in the car and closed her eyes, looking so wan and weak that he drove her home as fast as possible. She went right to bed, for she was really sick—sick at heart. Everything was changed. Miserably she felt that she did not want to get married. And suddenly she decided that she never wanted to see Walter again! No, never. He loomed in her confused imagination as an ogre waiting to devour her.

"Who are you? Where are you taking me?" she managed at last in a hoarse whisper

The next morning when he called up to ask how she felt she refused to speak to him. Instead she wrote a brief little note saying that she could not marry him; she offered profuse apologies, but no explanation.

Walter was not the man to be put off like that. As soon as he received the note he dashed over. "What's it all about?" he groaned to Mrs. Carlton. "What have I done?"

"As far as I can make out," she

answered sadly, "you have done nothing at all." She had become very fond of her would-be son-in-law and sympathized with him. If this marriage were really to be broken off she would be keenly disappointed; she was willing to do anything to mend the breach.

She tried to persuade Lucia to come from her room and make poor Walter some kind of explanation.

"You owe the poor boy an explanation at the very least," she scolded.

"I can't face him," moaned Lucia, putting her hands over her face as if to shut out his picture. "Please don't ask it of me."

"Then what is the matter? Tell me."

But Lucia could not put her troubled thoughts into words. All she knew was that all of a sudden there had seemed so much more to marriage than just marching up the aisle in a beautiful bridal gown. The man in the case had assumed such an amazingly important role that it terrified her. In her thoughts he lost all resemblance to the familiar Walter, and seemed some strange and repellent beast.

"Don't you love him?" persisted Mrs. Carlton.

"I don't know—and I don't want to think about it. Please don't torment me," sobbed the distracted girl. "I never thought about living together—I don't want to think about it."

When Walter heard that Lucia would not see him he was heartbroken, until Mrs. Carlton repeated the conversation; then he became thoughtful.

"I think I'm beginning to understand what the trouble is," he said. "If only Lucia would see me I'm sure that I can persuade her that it will all be all right. I thought she loved me, but I guess she didn't even know the meaning of love. I'm sure I can make her love me now."

But Lucia consistently refused to see him. No matter how pathetic a picture of the broken-hearted lover her mother painted, she would not be moved. For all she could see in her mind's eye was this vision of an ogre which her own imagination had created.

So all the arrangements for the wedding were to be cancelled.

"But Lucia," Mrs. Carlton wailed, "your lovely bridal dress—so smart, so expensive. And you were so keen to be a bride!"

"I don't want to hear that word again—ever!" flared the girl, and burst into hysterical weeping.

As all discussions ended the same way, in an hysterical attack, it was useless to pursue them.

But Walter would not give up.

"I won't give up until I'm sure Lucia does not love me!" he vowed.

IT was a day or two after this that Mrs. Carlton asked Lucia to do an errand for her in the evening.

"If you'd just run over to the store for me, Lucia," she said, "and match up this thread, I could finish my sewing to-night."

"But mother—" Lucia began to object.

Her mother, however, did not let her finish because she knew very well what she was going to say. For Lucia had been staying cloistered in the house dreading to see any one, ever since the marriage plans had been interrupted.

"You won't meet anybody at this time of night," she encouraged, "and the air will do you good. Of course, if you won't go," she sighed artfully, "I can go myself, but then I won't be able to finish."

"I'll go," Lucia hastened to accede, unable to be disobliging.

She sneaked up the street almost like an escaped criminal afraid of being recognized. When she turned the corner she looked anxiously about to see if any one she knew was in sight, but the street was deserted save for a limousine, apparently empty, standing at the curb, half way up the block. So she hurried along hoping to get to the store and back without being accosted. She felt that she could not bear curiosity or sympathy.

As she passed the limousine, still intent on escaping attention, she was startled to hear its door open, startled because the car had appeared deserted. Before she could turn around to satisfy her curiosity, she was grabbed from behind and jerked into the depths of the car while a firm hand clamped itself over her mouth to smother her incipient scream.

She struggled frantically, trying to tear herself from this grasp, beating about with her hands, kicking with her feet. But her efforts were futile against the hard strength of her captor. Lying quietly for a moment she tried to turn her head to see what manner of man had her in his power. Immediately her eyes were swathed in a bandage which was then fastened in place. Next her wrists were bound together, quite comfortably she noticed, but none the less securely.

By now the car was on its way, speeding she knew not where. What was happening to her? Who was her captor? Was she being kidnaped for ransom? That would be useless because her folks were not wealthy. Perhaps someone who did not know the wedding was off expected to have Walter pay a ransom. A thousand horrible suppositions chased through her terrified brain, until sheer fright deadened her senses and she fainted.

When she came to she was still in the car. That was her first discovery; then she realized that her eyes were uncovered. She was sitting beside someone, leaning against him, in the curve of his arm. There beside her were his knees, two sturdy masculine knees, clad in quite proper tweed. For a long time she sat gazing at these knees, without daring to follow them up and look at his face. They did not look dangerous, though. They were well dressed knees; her abductor was no rowdy.

At last, trembling the while, she turned her head and slowly lifted her eyes to look her enemy in the face. Her scrutiny met—a masked countenance! A black silk mask covered his face completely so that not even a portion of a feature was revealed. Her impulse to reach up and pull at the disguise was defeated by the fact that her hands were still bound.

Her mouth was free, but a glance from the window showed her that screaming would be of no avail. They were spinning along a shore road in a deserted bit of country. Before her the back of a man in livery bent over the wheel. They were *two* against her.

She tried to speak, but had to make several attempts before she could force the words through her constricted throat.

"Who are you? Where are you taking me?" she managed at last in a hoarse whisper.

He put a finger to his lips and shook his head, signifying that he could not or would not answer.

Suddenly she realized how comfortably she was resting in this creature's arm! With a violent shudder she drew away and sat proudly erect. The idea came to her to open the door and

jump from the car. It was going fast, but was not death preferable to whatever lay in store for her? Slyly she waited her chance, and when her captor's attention seemed to relax she threw herself on the door fumbling with her bound hands at the handle. It did not budge; it was locked. She drew back crestfallen, imagining that her captor chuckled maliciously. Then she gave up; she crouched despairingly in the corner and abandoned herself to her fate.

Sometime later the man took a silk handkerchief from his pocket and again bound her eyes. Presently the car stopped and she was invited to get out. That is, someone took her hands and gently pulled her to her feet and helped her out. Then she felt her elbow in his clasp and was guided along, up some steps, up an incline, along a passage way, into a room. There her hands were untied, and she felt herself left alone. Immediately she tore the covering off her eyes and examined her surroundings.

She was in the cabin of some kind of a boat; a small, comfortable cabin. And already the boat seemed to be in motion. She stepped to the door and tried to open it, but as she suspected, it was locked. She was a prisoner at sea: she who, a short hour before, had been prosaically going to the store to buy thread. And then she laughed at her own expense—she need not be afraid of encountering people she knew here!

She was exhausted and thought that since there was nothing she could do now, she might as well go to bed. A dainty silk crêpe night dress lay on the bed, a blue satin robe beside it, and on the floor were blue satin mules. Beautiful enough for a bride.

"I'm evidently expected!" she mused, wondering whom her host might be. At least, he had attended to her every want.

She did not dare get ready for bed until another inspection of the door revealed a bolt on the inside. Having secured this she felt comparatively safe for the night, and undressed as quickly as she could. Then she ducked into the bunk and pulled the covers way up over her head to shut out all bogies.

She was tired enough to sleep well despite her fears. In fact, she slept so heavily that when she awoke she could not at first recall where she was or what had happened to her. It came back to her little by little; from the time her mother asked her to go for the thread, to her present predicament.

She yawned, stretched, and felt ridiculously fit. So she decided to get dressed and then see if she could make enough noise to summon some one to let her out, or at least to answer her questions.

Getting up, she slid her feet into the mules and upon finding washing facilities treated herself to a sponge bath. By standing on the bunk she could look out the port hole, but all that was visible was a stretch of unruffled sea. The day was fine; she hated to think of spending it in the cabin. She would go up on deck.

When she was ready she slid the bolt and tried the door. To her astonishment it opened without resistance, and she stepped out into the gangway.

From there she found her way on deck without being intercepted. The boat, she discovered, was a small yacht, and it bespoke luxury even to her inexperienced eyes.

She drew a deep breath, filling her lungs with the good salt air. "Now,"

she thought; "I'm ready to face my fate."

THEREUPON Lucia started to explore the vessel. As she rounded the cabin she saw a man leaning on the railing with his back to her. Cautiously she made her way over to him and when she had come quite close without being heard, uttered a timid "good-morning."

The man whirled about. *It was Walter.*

"Walter!" she choked, surprise and relief swelling within her.

How good it was to see his pleasant, familiar face! How dear he looked to her! Why had she thought that she did not want to see him again? She held out her hand and he clasped it tightly in his, as speechless as she.

Lucia found her voice first.

"Were you kidnaped, too?" she asked, awed at the thought.

He looked surprised, seemed about to say something, then nodded assent slowly. He still clutched her hand and she did not try to withdraw it; there was a huge comfort in his firm grip.

"Who did it and what's it all about?" she whispered, looking confidently into his eyes and realizing for the first time how pleasant it was to meet his gaze. What nice, steady eyes he had! Why had she never noticed it before?

He shrugged in answer to her question, and drew her over to sit on a hatch. She sat close to him and rested her head against his shoulder. It was rather fun to be here in this mysterious fashion with Walter. How silent he was! He seemed upset.

"Let's go and ask the captain about it," she suggested. "Perhaps we can bribe him to take us back."

"I've tried," he replied tersely.

"Wouldn't he?"

"No. He takes orders only from his master."

"Who is his master?"

"He won't tell."

"Is he on board?"

"I've seen no one but an elderly woman."

Lucia giggled nervously. "Our chaperone!" Then she added thoughtfully: "We wouldn't need one if we were married."

"That's true!" sighed he, and improved the opportunity. "Why don't you want to get married? Won't you tell me all about it, dear?"

"I—I," she stammered bewildered, and did not know how to go on.

"Is it because you don't love me?" he asked gently.

"I never thought about love," she replied honestly. "I only thought about the fun of being a bride. And I was ashamed to think I got engaged to you like that."

A gong sounded from below.

"That's the breakfast gong," Walt explained. "Shall we go?"

So they went to the small dining saloon and found a table set with two places. At another table sat the elderly woman. When they passed her Lucia stopped to ask if she would tell her what they were doing there. The woman motioned to her lips and to her ears significantly.

"Deaf mute," deducted Walter.

"How well planned all this is!" Lucia marvelled. "I do wonder what the idea is."

"I'm not going to worry about that," he declared, "because I have you here. Don't you know, sweetheart, that having you is the only thing that matters to me?"

Lucia's ears burned at these words, spoken in Walter's deep, sincere voice.

They stirred an answering chord in her heart for the first time. Before when he had spoken like that she had been so absorbed in her own interests that she had scarcely heard him. Now, perhaps because she was isolated from all her old life, she was really getting acquainted with him.

When nothing dreadful happened that first day, Lucia began to wonder. And a tiny suspicion arose in her mind. A rapturous suspicion.

The voyage itself was charming and comfortable. The deaf-mute made an admirable chaperone, continually in evidence but never intrusive. And Walter was adorable. He was the best sort of companion, considerate, good-humored, interesting.

But after a couple of days to her own amazement Lucia began to resent this amiable companionship. After all, they had been engaged; one might expect him to play the rôle of sweetheart. She wished he would kiss her. She was surprised to realize that she was hungry for his kisses, she who used to consider them a nuisance! Every time she looked at his firm lips her own tingled wishfully.

One evening they were promenading the deck at a great rate in a joking pretense of walking three miles. Tiring of this sport they sat down on a hatch to count the stars. It was when Lucia was staring up with her lips pursed to say "twelve" that Walter leaned down and kissed her. She met the kiss frankly and gave in return from the new richness of her heart.

When Walter finally broke away he looked at her with contrition and consternation.

"I'm sorry, Lucia," he muttered, "I forgot myself. You looked so—so kissable."

For answer she lifted up her lips and said "twelve" again mischievously Walter needed no further invitation. He clasped her in his arms and kissed her again and again, while she responded ecstatically, squeezing as close to him as she could—she felt now as if she could never get close enough! When he stopped kissing her she rubbed her cheek against the roughness of his coat in utter rapture. She was in love; she knew now what it meant to be in love—this was her man—

"Walter," she murmured under his ear, "do you still want to marry me?"

"Lucia! Don't ask me unless you are going to say you will," he implored.

"I will!" she responded promptly. "Because I love you—not because I want to wear a bridal veil!"

"Thank God, my darling!" he breathed fervently. "At last I have won you!"

"But I can't imagine when or how we are going to get married," she sighed presently, but with a mischievous look. "It looks as if we were going to spend the rest of our lives on the high seas!"

"That would suit me so long as we spend them together."

"Yes, honey, but it's so horribly uncertain. The suspense is shattering my nerves."

"Are you sorry it happened?" he asked gently.

"No—oh no! I might never have discovered my real feeling for you. Why just think, I might have gone on thinking that I didn't want to see you!" She shuddered at the thought.

Walter sat silent for so long that she put a hand to his cheek and turned his face to hers. The look of distress she expected was crinkling his eyes. She demanded:

"What's the matter? What are you thinking?"

"I have a confession to make," he said in a low, uncertain voice.

"Go right ahead," she invited brightly, happily.

"But I'm afraid you won't forgive me. I couldn't bear to lose you, just when I have found you."

"You couldn't get rid of me now." To prove it she snuggled still closer to him. "I'll forgive anything. Come on, tell me the awful truth."

"But it *is* awful truth," he groaned miserably. "I—*I* did it," he blurted, while his face flushed a dull brick red and his eyes avoided hers.

"Did what?" she asked calmly.

"Kidnaped you!"

"Wha—at?"

Lucia succeeded in looking astounded and horrified. She drew away from him and stared with wide eyes. "What fun!" she exclaimed inadequately. "So romantic, just like olden times when the knights ran off with their fair lady!"

He looked at her incredulously. "You aren't angry?"

"Of course not. I think it was a wonderful idea! But whose boat is this?"

"Mine—that is, it may be mine some day. It was to be a wedding present from my dad!"

"How wonderful!" she exclaimed, really enraptured. "Of course it will be yours—any time you say. Let's go ashore and find a justice of the peace."

"I know a better one than that: let's go home and have our wedding, and you will wear a beautiful bridal dress."

"Don't tease me, Walt," she begged, humbly. "I don't care about those things now. I've learned that they are very superficial compared with love. And anyway it would create just too much talk if we had a wedding now after cancelling it."

"But it wasn't cancelled," he informed her, laughing at her surprise. "Your mother didn't do a thing about it. As soon as she heard my plan she said she was sure it would all come out all right and that we would be back for the wedding!"

"Then she sent me for the thread on purpose!" she guessed with a chuckle at the idea of her mother's conspiracy. "Good for mother!" She sat still a second with her hand on his knee, thinking over the events of the past few weeks. How much had happened!

"Well, is it surely all right?" he worried, leaning forward to study her expression.

"Surely!" she cried, and added provocatively, "Let's count the stars again—"

He held out his arms and she flung herself into them, submitting to his caresses in a transport of delight.

"Twelve!" she breathed, and their lips met in a delicious promise of future bliss.

Wealthy but perhaps a hopeless invalid; beautiful but poor and alone—both girls demanded of stubborn Fate their right to Love. And then a daring plan brought each girl her man!

Fighting for Love

By PEGGY GADDIS

CAROLINE stepped out of the taxi, lifted the big box from the front seat, encircled it with her strong young arms and airily dismissed the chauffeur.

Cradling the huge white box in her arms she mounted the steps of the narrow, impressive-looking house in East Sixty-seventh Street and rang the bell. The door swung open an inch to reveal a footman in plum-colored livery, and a few steps back of him an impressive, ruddy-cheeked English butler.

"Good morning," Caroline greeted

Laura, who might never know love, listened greedily

the butler as she stepped into the foyer. "Please tell your mistress that the model and the gowns from Cecile's are here."

In her brief little beige silk frock and tight little brown hat cocked at a knowing angle above eyes that were brown and merry, Caroline looked a picture.

"If you'll just come this way, miss?" suggested the butler, his eyes twinkling in admiration.

He led the way up the beautifully proportioned stairs, along a corridor, and to a door which he flung open. Caroline stepped into the room and saw a trim little maid in black and white awaiting her.

Five minutes later the trim little beige crepe frock and the tight little brown helmet hat were doffed, and the copper-gold curls, with just a twist of a pocket comb, had settled into little rippling waves that thrilled the maid with artistic appreciation. Next the hooks and eyes of a slim creamy satin evening frock, whose uneven hemline was weighted with tiny roses, embroidered in seed pearls, were fastened, and Caroline stepped into silver pumps, spread open a fan of lustrous sapphire blue feathers, and followed the maid across the room to another door, which she opened and indicated that Caroline should go into the adjoining room.

Caroline was more or less accustomed to modelling frocks for wealthy women in their own homes—women who had acquired the idea in England and in Paris—and she had seen a great many beautiful homes. This was by far the most beautiful she had ever seen. But before she could take in the details of its beauty her eye fell upon

the mistress of it all and her envy was swallowed in pity.

FOR the girl who sat waiting so eagerly for her—was a cripple. Thin, pallid, with enormous dark brown eyes and a soft fluff of lusterless curls framing a small, bitter, wistful face. With a trained nurse in the starchiest of stiff white uniforms standing slightly back of her wheel chair. With a maid hovering on the other side of the chair.

The girl was about her own age, Caroline decided, and her warm young heart gave a swift, sharp stab of pity for the other's helplessness and frustration.

She sensed, as she walked slowly forward, turned, walked back, displaying the lovely frock, that the girl in the wheel chair was watching her instead of the frock, and the thought brought a glimmer of tears to her eyes.

"It's very pretty—but I don't think it would be becoming to me!" said the invalid at last, pettishly. "I like something with more color!"

Caroline went back into the other room where the maid was waiting, and donned another of the charming frocks that she had brought with her. For two hours she displayed frocks to the peevish girl in the other room. Paraded before her in the silky, chiffony negligees, undies, wraps, furs.

Now and then the girl in the chair would say, swiftly:

"I like that—I'll take it! No, that's ugly—take it away!"

At last, when every gown had been displayed and those the crippled girl had not wanted were packed once more in the big white box, Caroline donned her own little beige frock, her own brown slippers and the knowing little brown hat.

"I wanted to thank you for the order, Miss Arden!" she said, as she was about to take her leave. "And I hope you will let me come up again some time and show you some more of our new things."

The crippled girl was staring at her with something very like a sneer on her thin lips; but Caroline, her warm young heart aching with pity for this pathetic young thing, disregarded that sneer.

"I suppose you think it is hilariously funny for a cripple to be buying beautiful clothes that she can't possibly wear!" she sneered bitterly, but there was the cry of a tortured girl's heart in the tone.

"No, of course I don't—I hadn't thought it was—at all funny!" said Caroline, quiet honestly, though something warned her not to say that she thought it pathetic.

Suddenly the crippled girl cried out savagely, bitterly, and pummeled her soft fists against her paralyzed knees, her face twisted with a look of bitter, futile rage, of helpless fury.

"It isn't fair—it isn't fair!" she raged furiously. "All my life I've been poor—shabby—cold! Always, my father promised that some day we'd have everything—*everything!* Mother died of starvation—poverty—a pretty thought to remember! And—the next year, dad struck oil—a gusher! But—he didn't care about going on living without mother and I was left alone. With money pouring in—thousands of dollars a day!

"It scared me—I was so terribly alone—but at last I had what dad had promised me—everything in the world that any sane girl could want—except—love! When I was sixteen I was thrown from horseback—my spine injured—a hopeless cripple! Now, when

I can buy all the pretty clothes I want, and all the fun and good times—I'm chained here to this *damned* chair! It isn't fair—I tell you, it isn't fair!"

The girl's voice had mounted to a shriek, and her face was scarlet. She was shaking like a leaf. Caroline shuddered sickly, and shrank a little from the hideous sight of a human being in almost unbearable revolt against circumstances over which there could be no control.

The nurse hurried forward with half a glass of milky-white fluid that gave off a pungent smell as she held it to the girl's lips, and Caroline heard the glass tinkle against clenched teeth.

Acutely uncomfortable, Caroline tried to slip unobtrusively from the room, but before she reached the door the crippled girl caught sight of her and thrust the nurse unceremoniously aside.

"Wait a minute, you—model! I want to talk to you!" she ordered imperiously, in the tone of an empress addressing one of the palace serfs. "I'm quite all right, nurse—I won't break out again! I want to talk to this girl—alone. I'll ring if I want you."

CAROLINE was sorry to see the nurse go; for, like most entirely healthy, normal young things, she had something approaching a horror of the abnormal. And it was only too apparent that this girl was abnormal.

The moment the door closed the crippled girl beckoned to Caroline, with a delightful air of secrecy and eagerness that made her look younger, more winning.

"Come over here and sit down. I've just thought of something!" she cried eagerly, indicating a deep wing chair close beside her.

Masking her reluctance, Caroline did so.

"You're so pretty!" the invalid began swiftly, eagerly. "And you're of my coloring—brown hair and eyes and fair skin, though, of course, you are much prettier. And you look so lovely in the clothes I buy. Why couldn't you come and live with me, and wear these clothes, and go out to parties, and have beaux and good times, just as I would have done if I hadn't had such rotten luck? And then you could come home and tell me all about everything you've done and seen. That way, I wouldn't be—quite so like a stick—just lying here, living by inches! At least, I'd have *your* excitement, and *your* fun and *your* good times to look forward to—even if I could never hope for any of my own. Why couldn't you?"

Caroline blinked and passed a hand dazedly across her eyes, bewildered by the other girl's rapid, amazing speech, and the utterly incredible proposition she was offering.

"Well, upon my word!" she gasped, inadequately.

A sudden thought that the invalid might be insane caused her to draw back a little, with something like fear in her brown eyes. But as if reading her thought, Laura Arden cried out sharply, impatiently:

"No, no—I'm quite sane—quite all right. Won't you? Please won't you?"

She was like a child, pleading for a coveted toy—

The whole thing struck Caroline as utterly absurd. If she had read of such a situation in a story she would have yawned, and dismissed it as far-fetched and impossible. Yet here was this poor little helpless invalid, pleading with her—as though she held in her two hands a precious boon that

would mean to this girl a new lease on life.

And suddenly Caroline's youthful imagination caught fire from the spark of the other girl's excitement.

After all—why not? As this girl's companion, she could bring a little of happiness and brightness, of youth, within these walls. As for herself—well, she grew a little dizzy at the thought of the excitement of changing her nine-to-five job at Cecile's for the life here.

"You haven't any relatives—a sweetheart—who would object?" suggested Miss Arden, anxiously.

"Oh, no—I'm utterly alone in the world—save for an aunt in New Hampshire, with whom I lived until I was old enough to earn my own living! And I've never had time for sweethearts," said Caroline, swiftly.

"Then I *don't* see why you hesitate. I'll double the salary Cecile is paying you—you'll have no expenses—"

"Dr. Jenkins is here, Miss Arden!" interrupted the nurse's professionally cheery voice from the doorway. She stood aside as a cheerful man in correct afternoon garb entered swiftly.

He spoke lightly to the patient, nodded at Caroline, and took up the chart hanging on the back of the wheel chair. When he had finished his reading of it, Laura Arden turned to him swiftly.

"Dr. Jenkins, what do you think of my having a companion? A girl my own age, who would live here with me, all the time—who would go out to parties and dances and things, and come home to tell me all about them?"

Behind his neat rimless glasses the doctor's eyes blinked. He thought a moment; then said in surprise:

"Why, that would be a corking idea! Why haven't we thought of it before? Do you know any one we could get?"

Thin fingers indicated Caroline.

"I've been trying to persuade Miss—this girl, who is a model from Cecile's. She hesitates because she thinks I'm—a little balmy!" she returned, with a sarcastic inflection.

Dr. Jenkins turned swiftly to Caroline, but before he could speak Caroline cried out honestly:

"It isn't that! It's only that—I would benefit so much more by it than Miss Arden could possibly do—it seems to be taking advantage of her."

Dr. Jenkins smiled, and stood up.

"Suppose, Miss Arden, that I drive Miss—the young lady—back to her shop, and discuss the plan with her en route? Perhaps I may persuade her?"

"All right!" snapped the invalid ungraciously, and turned away as though she had lost interest in the subject.

OUTSIDE in the clear, faintly cool twilight, Caroline drew a deep breath and squared her shoulders. Dr. Jenkins stowed the half-empty box from Cecile's inside the car, helped Caroline in, settled himself beneath the wheel, and allowed the car to gather headway before he spoke.

"The plan Miss Arden suggested—it appeals to you?"

"Well I *ask* you, Dr. Jenkins!" said Caroline, frankly. "I earn my living by parading up and down Cecile's showroom all day wearing five-hundred-dollar frocks and five-thousand-dollar wraps! And at night I put on my own twenty-two-fifty frock and my thirty-nine-seventy-five coat, and go home to a hall bedroom! Miss Arden offers me everything in the way of luxury, it's only that—I'm afraid I shouldn't feel honest."

"You may put that thought out of your head entirely!" said Dr. Jenkins, almost grimly. "You would be giving her the one thing in life that she genuinely needs—a new interest—something to think about besides herself. A ray of—hope!"

Caroline turned a startled, eager face to him.

"You mean—hope that she might get well?" she cried, eagerly.

"Frankly, Miss—Meredith? Thank you! Frankly, then, Miss Meredith, I don't know. *But I do know* that if we could build up her strength to a point where she would be able to undergo an operation, there would be a chance. Nowadays, no doctor who values his professional reputation comes out flatly and says that any case is hopeless, but I honestly believe that if Miss Arden's mind could be diverted for a few months she would have at least a fighting chance for partial recovery. I hope you will agree to the offer."

Caroline was silent for a moment, her eyes shining, her cheeks flushed, dimpling. She was very lovely as she turned to the doctor.

"Then I shall!" she decided promptly.

"Good! I'm glad to hear it!" said the doctor, heartily, and gripped her hand with a friendly, heartening smile.

II

IN the ugly little sitting room of the cheap little hotel apartment that was the only home she could afford "between engagements," Alicia Van Tuyl was giving her nephew his tea. It wasn't very good tea, and the nephew was stirring his spoon round and round in it, dreading the inevitable moment when he must at least make a show of drinking it.

"So, of course, as soon as I found that there were two girls and that there was, apparently, a very great deal of money — oil-wells in Oklahoma, Charles! You know what that means! I thought of you!" Alicia was saying, as she poured her own tea.

The handsome young man opposite her looked a trifle startled.

"That was very kind of you, Aunt Allie. I'm awfully glad you've landed a good job—" he stopped, as Alicia lifted her head proudly, and he saw that he had offended her.

"Please, Charles—you are unbearably rude!" she told him, icily. "These two young women are of unimpeachable family. They wish to see something of the social side of New York. If I chaperone them—introduce them to the right people—for which I receive some compensation for my time and effort, is there anything wrong with that? Any more than if I had happened to be an interior decorator accepting a commission for advising them about an apartment?"

"Sorry, Aunt Allie. No offense meant. I'm sure you already know that!" Charles hastened to assure her. "But what I was going to say is that I can't see where it will concern me."

Aunt Alicia fixed him with a stern, frosty blue eye.

"Haven't you ever thought of marriage, Charles?" she demanded.

"Certainly, a hundred or so years from now, when I have more than two pennies to rub together in my pockets," he told her, comfortably. "But not on the commissions of a not-too-successful bond salesman."

"A wealthy wife would solve a great many problems—eh, Charles?" she insinuated, delicately.

Charles looked a trifle grim.

"And present a lot of new and much worse ones!" he pointed out.

"No, thanks. When I marry, Aunt Allie, it will be for love and nothing else."

"But wouldn't it be just as easy to fall for a pretty *rich* girl as for a pretty penniless one?" Aunt Alicia demanded.

Charles grinned.

"Maybe, but I've never known any rich pretty ones that would give me a second glance," he told her, and gratefully sneaked his untasted cup of tea back on the tea table where she would not see it until he had gone.

"That's exactly why you are coming to this tea on Wednesday afternoon," said Aunt Alicia firmly. "Now, now, no squirming out of it, Charles. I ask it of you as a very great favor to me. In the first place, I want as many people as possible present. And, in the second place, I want you to be among the first to meet the cousin who is strong. The invalid cousin I shall have you meet at a family party later."

Charles sighed. He didn't want to go; but after all he owed Aunt Allie a deuce of a lot. She had been the only mother he had ever known.

THERE was a gay hum of voices in the house on Sixty-Seventh Street, brittle laughter, a tinkle of fine china and silver, soft music and the fragrance of flowers. The setting was perfect, Charles told himself approvingly, and knew that his aunt was responsible.

He paused in the doorway a moment to take in the scene. A room that ran the entire length of the house, with a balcony across the back. Beneath this balcony a famous orchestra of stringed instruments.

And then his eyes fell upon the girl —and the rest of the scene faded from his mind.

She was standing beside his aunt, her lovely face lifted to the little group of men facing her. She had copper-colored curls that lay close to her proudly poised little head as though molded there. She wore an ivory taffeta frock, with a bertha of exquisite old lace about the shoulders. A knot of pale, shimmering green satin held a nosegay of pastel-colored flowers at the long waistline of her frock.

Charles drew a long breath, and found himself moving in the direction of the girl as though drawn by some force he was powerless to resist.

"Caroline, I want you and my nephew to be the best of friends. Miss Meredith, Mr. Laurens."

The girl turned her vivid, lovely face, her sparkling brown eyes upon Charles, and for a moment laid her slim hand in his, smiling, murmuring something in the loveliest voice that he had ever heard.

It was all over with him. Just like that.

Five minutes ago, mounting the steps of the tall, narrow house, he had been heart-whole and fancy free; a little bored at the thought of this "pink-tea fight," and anxious only to keep his promise to his aunt and then to escape. Now, however, he wished only to spend the rest of his life standing here looking with adoring eyes upon the only girl in the world.

And Caroline?

She had had a most exciting week—a most exciting afternoon. She had met dozens of charming, well-bred people who had been very pleasant to her.

But now—she had looked once into startled, steady blue eyes, eyes that seemed almost out of place in a face sun-tanned to the color of pale copper beneath a thatch of very blond hair, and the look in those blue eyes had

suddenly seemed to set off a tiny electric shock within her, so that her heart trembled a little with some strange new feeling that was almost fear.

She turned away almost gladly, to be presented to a tall, very dark young man, who was bowing from the waist, looking at her searchingly, and whose name, it appeared, was Prince Taranowsky. Obviously a Russian, even had she not heard Mrs. Van Tuyl address him familiarly as "Ivan."

"I'm still here!" murmured a voice at Caroline's elbow, and she turned to see Charles standing patiently beside her, waiting until she had finished with the Prince. "And I shall be right here until you promise that I shall see you again—very soon. To-morrow afternoon?"

Caroline laughed, a little low, excited laugh.

"I'd love to!" she told him, happily.

The Prince would have lingered, but Mrs. Van Tuyl slid her hand through his arm and drew him with her, a pleased smile on her face. He glanced back reluctantly at the lovely girl.

"Your protégée is exquisite," said the Prince.

"A charming child!" agreed Mrs. Van Tuyl, and looked Prince Ivan squarely in the eye. "And—a very fortunate one!"

"So?" murmured the Prince, interested, yet making an effort to conceal the fact.

"Well, one seldom finds a girl who is young, beautiful *and* enormously wealthy. I think Miss Meredith is fortunate, don't you?"

The Prince murmured an assent, and Mrs. Van Tuyl dropped her eyes demurely. Very well that clever lady knew the impetus that a bit of competition gives to a wooing. Very well did she know that the Prince *must* find a rich American wife. If she could get him interested in the pursuit of Caroline, whom she believed to be half owner of the fortune that was backing this social enterprise, it would give Charles something to make him fight.

BACK of a magnificent tapestried screen on the balcony a wheel chair had been drawn up, and there, her eyes shining like stars, her cheeks flushed with excitement, lay Laura Arden, watching the result of her plans. Bitterness, envy of other girls who could walk, was swallowed up in the delight of watching the scene below her. She could see the tall, blond young man standing beside Caroline, but her eyes followed the darker man who walked away with Mrs. Van Tuyl: personally, she thought him by far the handsomer of the two. Later, when the party was over, Caroline would tell her all about it—everything that both men had said. Laura drew a deep, hard breath of excited anticipation. It was like looking on at a play, only better; for when the curtain rang down the play would still go on.

LAURA was in bed when Caroline came into the room, still in her ivory and pale green frock. In bed, but far from asleep, for the moment Caroline entered Laura tried to sit up.

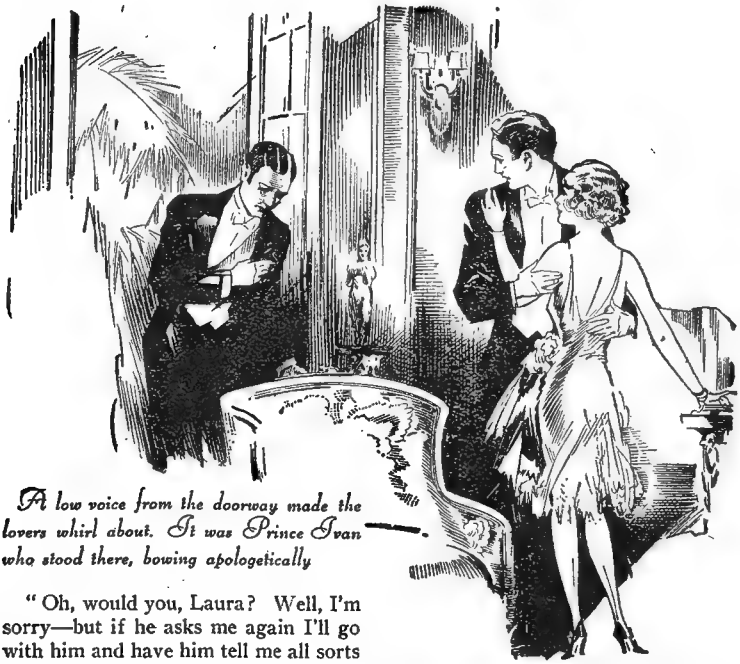
She gave a little gasp of pain.

"Come on, Caroline, and tell me all about it! I'm excited to pieces!" she cried. "Who was the handsome dark man?"

"A Prince, Laura," Caroline told her, swiftly. "A Russian Prince. But did you see the blond young man? That's Mrs. Van Tuyl's nephew! I'm lunching with him to-morrow!"

"I'd rather it was the Prince, Caroline!" said Laura, mutinously. "He looks ever so much more interesting! If *I* were going with either of them, *I'd* go with the Prince!"

Caroline looked a little startled.



A low voice from the doorway made the lovers whirl about. It was Prince Ivan who stood there, bowing apologetically

"Oh, would you, Laura? Well, I'm sorry—but if he asks me again I'll go with him and have him tell me all sorts of fascinating Russian yarns. Shall I?"

"I wish you would, please!" said Laura, crisply, with the note of one accustomed to giving commands. "And now—what else happened?"

So Caroline, with the feeling of opening a bag and spilling its contents upon the satin coverlet of the bed, took out every tiny memory of things that had happened that afternoon. Already she had learned that Laura was a most exacting task-mistress. She demanded full return for everything that she gave. Caroline had been given this opportunity to live in a manner that would not otherwise have been possible to her, but in return she was to have no privacy of thought or action. The moment she came into the house she must go straight to Laura's room, must search her memory for thoughts, happenings, as one searches for bright-hued bits of silk with which to amuse a child.

When at last she escaped from Laura's room to her own, she stood for a long time facing the reflection of the girl in the mirror, her brown eyes a little sober, almost fearful.

"Well," she told herself at last, grimly, "you've tasted all the joys of frugal living, cheap clothes, hall bedroom, dime-a-dozen amusements. Now you're being introduced to the fleshpots of Egypt. What if you *are* a painted doll to amuse a rich invalid? You've had the rest—poverty, and all that. I think you're a simpleton to worry. Any time you get tired of this life of gilded ease there's always Old Man Independence in the shape of a job crooking a bony finger at you! So—let's stick here a bit longer—shall we?"

And the girl in the mirror nodded, blithely.

III

TWO weeks later Caroline had come to know both the Prince and Charles much better.

One day she had an inspiration. Laura was intensely interested in the two men; she questioned Caroline about them until Caroline wanted to shriek to high Heaven. And then, suddenly, it dawned on her that Laura should meet the two men personally, and have a chance to find out about them for herself.

So Caroline discussed the plan with the trained nurse and with Dr. Jenkins. And Dr. Jenkins gave his consent.

And then Caroline told Laura.

"You see, you can meet them and talk to them. That will be better than just having me tell you about them, won't it? You can wear a hostess gown—something traily, and silky and soft—and the tea table can be put right in front of you so that you can serve tea yourself. Would you like that?"

The quick, happy tears that sprang into Laura's eyes told Caroline how much she would like it, and Caroline's warm young heart was touched with pity.

In the excitement of preparing for callers, Laura's bad temper vanished and she spent hours deciding on the gown that she would wear. Eventually she chose a thing of sapphire blue velvet, belted with a thick silver cord. Intricate embroidery of silver leaves circled the round neck, and wide, loose sleeves of blue chiffon reached almost to her finger tips.

Behind the candle-lit tea table, her eyes like stars, her cheeks flushed, Laura made a charming picture, and both Charles and the Prince were very gentle and very attentive. From the first moment she ignored Charles, giving her undivided attention to the Prince; and as soon as Charles was sure of this he drew Caroline quickly from the room, to a little glassed-in terrace at the left, where birds sang happily in the fragrant warmth.

"Poor Laura!" said Caroline, smiling a little through gentle tears. "So eager for life—and yet denied even a taste of it!"

Charles took a step closer and bent his head above her.

"Darling, I adore you when you look like a poster of April—tears and laughter mingled, and a hint of Spring in the air, and all that!" he told her, unsteadily, his voice throbbing with tenderness. "Let's not talk about Laura. Let's talk about you and me. When we first started to care for each other, and how soon we are going to be married!"

Caroline caught her breath. For one dizzy moment she allowed herself to look up into his eyes, breathless with an emotion that threatened to sweep her from her feet and into his arms. She fought valiantly for some light, careless word—feeling suddenly that

she must protect herself, yet wanting with all her soul to feel his arms about her, his mouth on hers.

"Don't—don't—be s-s-silly!" she stammered, a trifle wildly. "Who ever said I loved you—or that I mean to marry you?"

"Nobody. but you are going to just the same, aren't you?" Very low. Then his arms went about her, not suddenly, but gently, inexorably, holding her very, very close, with a latent strength that sent little quivers of delight through all her body.

"Darling," he whispered, his voice far from steady. "Oh, my darling; I love you so! I love you so! You must marry me—right away! To-morrow! What's to prevent?"

And then, as she flung up her head in startled protest, he set his mouth on hers in a kiss for which she yearned with a strength that almost frightened her. A kiss that seemed to sweep the ground from beneath her feet. A kiss that brought her heart up to her lips and gave it into his keeping.

The next moment, tearing like a hob-nailed boot through the butterfly-loveliness of the spell that held them, a man's voice spoke from the doorway. They whirled about, to see Prince Taranowsky looking at them with an odd expression, a little pale, but entirely self-composed.

"I am so sorry that I intrude!" he apologized with perfect courtesy, bowing a little from the waist. "But Miss Arden—she asks that Miss Meredith come—she say that tea has just been brought in."

Caroline, scarlet-cheeked, unable to look at either of the men, murmured something and fled.

Charles and the Prince stood quite still, staring at each other, as enmity was born in their two hearts. And then, with an inscrutable smile, the Prince turned on his heel and walked back into the drawing-room, Charles following.

Laura was very much occupied with her duties as hostess, filling cups while the Prince, with his inimitable Old World manner, handed them about. It was a peaceful scene that the soft candle light illumined, but three hearts at least held no peace.

TUCKED into her big specially constructed bed, Laura told Caroline her impressions of the two men.

"I *can't* understand, Caroline, how you can waste two moments on that stupid blond fellow!" she began frankly. "The Prince is such a darling! I'm mad about him!"

Caroline swallowed her mounting anger and forced herself to speak lightly.

"Think how nice it is that we haven't both fallen in love with the same man," she pointed out. "Otherwise, we might be at each other's throats this moment!"

Laura lifted her head a little.

"Aren't you forgetting something?" she asked coldly.

Caroline looked puzzled.

"I don't think so—what?"

"Aren't you forgetting the terms of our bargain?" pointed out Laura, nastily. "I have kept my part of the bargain—are you going to welch on yours?"

Caroline's face flamed with healthy resentment.

"I don't in the least know what you are talking about. But I most certainly resent both your tone and your implication!" she said sharply.

"A beggar-maid putting on airs!" sneered Laura, her eyes shining with

some queer excitement. "Have you forgotten that our bargain was that I was to furnish you with all the things that you had never owned, and that you, in turn, were going to live my life as I would have lived it—had things been different? That you were to do exactly what I would have done?"

"Of course I haven't forgotten. Haven't I followed the terms to the letter? How have I failed to keep my bargain?" demanded Caroline.

Was her job still open at Cecile's, she wondered, angrily? If not, there'd be something elsewhere! She'd not stay here another night!

"So far I have had no complaint to make," announced Laura, more kindly. "But from this moment on you will drop this silly blond man, and you will encourage the Prince."

Caroline stood up, her face white and set.

"I shall do nothing of the sort!" she said hotly. "I am leaving this house to-night. I'm sorry, but the bargain is off. Mr. Laurens has asked me to marry him and I shall most certainly do so!"

Laura was startled. She raised herself a little.

"Oh, no, no—Caroline, I'm sorry! I didn't mean to make you angry. You mustn't go away—why, I'm just beginning to have a marvelous time! You don't have to drop Mr. Laurens of course, if you don't want to. I only meant that if I were in your place I'd take the Prince. Caroline—Caroline please don't go! Please don't!" She was pleading, her voice rising a little on an hysterical note.

The nurse came swiftly into the room.

"I'm surprised, Miss Meredith, that you allow her to work herself up like this, and just at her bedtime, too. You know it's most important that she sleep well," scolded the nurse sharply. "There, there, my dear, Miss Meredith will do whatever you want her to, of course!" she added to the sick girl.

"I'll stay, Laura. And now don't think about it any more. Go straight to sleep. We'll plan something nice for to-morrow," promised Caroline.

Eventually Laura went to sleep, and Caroline was free to slip away to her own room. She and Mrs. Van Tuyl were due at a dinner dance later on, and she would have to hurry to get dressed in time. She forced herself to put the thought of the ugly little scene with Laura out of her mind, and to concentrate on the dearness of Charles and the sweetness of the moment when he had held her close in his arms and kissed her. When he had said, "I love you—I love you."

A little delicious tingle ran through her veins, and she closed her eyes for an ecstatic moment. Married to Charles! What a glorious thought! The heady sweetness of it!

With her eyes on the clock she slid into her evening wrap, caught her little rhinestone evening bag and fan, and went along the corridor toward Mrs. Van Tuyl's room. Before she reached it Mrs. Van Tuyl called to her from the foot of the shallow stairs.

"Caroline? My dear, I came down without my fan. Will you step into my room and bring it along with you—there's a dear."

"Of course!" called Caroline. She opened the door and walked swiftly to the dressing table, where the fan of peacock feathers lay, its ivory handle glimmering in the soft light.

As she turned away, the draught created by the opened door blew a sheet of writing paper halfway across the room. Carelessly, Caroline stooped

to pick it up. The scribbled words leaped up at her with all the force of a stunning blow:

MY DEAR CHARLES:

I have just heard Caroline telling Laura that you have asked her to marry you and that she has said yes. Congratulations, my dear boy! Didn't I tell you that it was just as easy—and *much* more sensible—to fall in love with a pretty, *rich* girl?

The letter was unfinished. But it was utterly damning in what it did say. It was all so terribly obvious—Mrs. Van Tuyl had brought her nephew here to marry a girl who was ostensibly as wealthy as Laura.

FOR a long moment Caroline stood quite still. Her hands seemed suddenly icy, and trembled violently. Charles! As easy to fall in love with a pretty, rich girl as a pretty, penniless one! And ever so much more sensible! The words seemed to burn themselves into her brain.

Even while she put the letter carefully back on the desk and weighted it down, even while she went methodically out of the door and down the steps to where Mrs. Van Tuyl awaited her, Caroline had a feeling of walking in her sleep.

An hour ago she had thrilled to the memory of Charles's arms about her, his lips warm on hers, his words of endearment in her ears. Two hours ago he had held her close and kissed her, and in a voice that had not been quite steady had told her that he adored her. And now, in the utterly merciless words of his aunt, she realized that the whole thing had been a trap. They had been searching for a rich wife for Charles, and the choice had fallen upon her.

She shivered a little and closed her eyes, leaning back in her corner of the limousine as far as possible away from Mrs. Van Tuyl, who was chatting happily, utterly oblivious. Almost, she told herself bitterly, she was tempted to go through with it; to marry him, and then let him discover that he had married a girl who hadn't a penny except what she could earn with her own two hands. It would serve him right; would be a gorgeous joke on him!

But when she stood in the ballroom and saw Charles come toward her, his eyes eager, adoring, his lips curved in a worshiping smile, she knew that she couldn't go through with it, knew that her only safety lay in seeing as little of Charles as possible—for if she saw very much of him, she told herself grimly, she wouldn't care whether it was herself or her fortune that he loved.

He came toward her and she turned her back upon him deliberately, putting her hand through the arm of the surprised and delighted Prince. Across his shoulder as they danced she saw Charles, standing quite still, staring in wide-eyed amazement as though he could not believe his eyes. A look of grim determination came over his face, and he threaded his way through the dancers and touched the Prince on the shoulder.

"Break, please! I mean—I'm cutting in if you don't mind!" he said quietly.

Caroline lifted her head. "Sorry—I don't wish—"

But Charles ignored her, and the Prince relinquished his partner with very poor grace. Charles drew Caroline's slim, unyielding body into his arms. They danced once about the room. Then he drew her to a doorway that opened upon a little balcony.

"You seem to have a great fancy for balconies and glassed-in-terraces!" was

the first thing Caroline could find to say.

"I have a fancy for going straight to the bottom of mysteries and finding out what they are all about," he told her harshly. "This afternoon you let me hold you in my arms and kiss you. To-night you treat me as though I were a pariah. I want to know why!"

CAROLINE drew a deep breath to steady herself.

"You surely didn't think that I took you seriously this afternoon—" she began lightly, laughing a cool, brittle little laugh.

"Don't lie, Caroline. You are a most inept liar," cut in Charles coldly. "What has happened since you kissed me this afternoon and let me tell you that I loved you?"

And Caroline gave him the truth in one stinging little sentence.

"I have learned that you are the lowest of human creatures—a man who deliberately plans to marry a woman for her money!" she told him. "And since I am to be married for my money, I think I deserve a more fair exchange. Don't you?"

Charles's gasp was as though she had flung ice water in his face. Silence. Caroline was trembling so hard that she folded her soft bare hands about the wrought iron banister of the little balcony and clenched them until the iron bruised her palms.

"So! That's it, eh?" he said finally, very, very quietly. "And—is it permitted that I ask how you learned this about me?"

"Through a letter that I inadvertently saw—a letter written to you by your aunt!" she answered steadily. "Please do not make an effort to deny it. I assure you that you could not convince me now. I solemnly hope that I shall never see you again as long as we both shall live!"

Charles's face whitened, set. He spoke in a voice that was like cut steel.

"If ever you see me again, it will be because you have come to me—not I to you!" He bowed, turned on his heel and walked away.

She stood there in the shadows cowering against the wall, her little world of magic and glamour and delight that had been built by her love for this man smashing to bits within the clutch of her eager fingers.

But she was not to be allowed to remain there weeping in the darkness. Very soon the Prince claimed her, and she flung herself into the evening with an almost mad abandon. If her laughter was keyed a little high, her voice a shade too gay, no one in all that crowded room knew that underneath she was suffering.

Mrs. Van Tuyl had seen Charles and Caroline go out on the terrace, and had smiled blissfully. A little later she had seen Charles return alone, his face white and set, his eyes blazing. Had seen him leave the place, and, a little later, had seen the Prince claim Caroline and draw her into the dance.

And she had wondered mightily.

On the way home she ventured a question to Caroline, and Caroline answered her frankly, almost brutally.

"Charles is a very nice chap, Mrs. Van Tuyl. But princes are more decorative, don't you think? I mean, if one is to be married for one's money one might at least get a title in exchange. And Charles has neither title nor money, has he?"

She waited tensely for the answer. Could it be possible that she had made a mistake—that she had misjudged Charles? Oh, if she found that he were wealthy, and not a fortune-hunter—

how gladly she would go to him, how gladly apologize for the terrible things she had said! Everything hinged upon Mrs. Van Tuyl's answer.

When it came it brought death to that tiny, newborn hope. "No!" said Mrs. Van Tuyl shortly.

And Caroline turned her hurt, white face to the darkness outside the limousine window. Her heart dropped like a plummet in her breast—down, down, down—until it seemed to rest just above the heels of her smart rose and silver brocade slippers.

IV

IN the morning Caroline went into Laura's sitting room.

"Was it a nice party, Caroline? Tell me who was there and everything!" begged Laura, greedy for the bits of bright-hued silks with which her imagination played—Caroline's thoughts and impressions.

"First of all, I broke with Charles—Mr. Laurens—and spent the evening dancing with the Prince. He is coming to tea at four this afternoon. And this morning he sent me these. With this card." Caroline held up a spray of gardenias exquisitely white, that looked as if they had been cut less than an hour ago.

On the card beneath a tiny coronet, was engraved the name, "Prince Ivan Paul Lebedeff Taranowsky," with all except the "Ivan" marked out with a pencil. On the back was written:

They are not half so lovely as the lady to whom I send them.

Laura drew a little excited breath and calmly appropriated the gardenias. The card, too, she took as her own. Caroline smiled a little as she sat down beside the wheel chair and waited for the barrage of questions that she knew Laura would fire at her very soon.

And as she waited, she made a discovery. The Laura who sat before her now, propped up on her pillows, was not the same pallid invalid she had first seen. This girl was flushed, bright-eyed; she had even gained a few pounds of weight. Caroline felt that, in a tiny way, this had evened the score between them.

Laura held the gardenias against her cheek for a moment.

"I—never had a—suitor, Caroline—you don't mind if I pretend it's—me—that he—cares for?" she asked, wistfully, humbly, all trace of her arrogance vanished in that little wave of confusion and humility.

"You darling—of course I don't! You see, Laura, I'm not the least bit in love with the Prince. He's an interesting, likable, handsome young fellow; I like him as a friend. But I don't love him. So you see, I couldn't be jealous!"

"But—you'll be nice to him? You'll let him come to call—you'll—let him—make love to you—as if you were me? You'll marry him, if he asks you?" begged Laura, swiftly.

Caroline flung out her hand in a swift little gesture of protest.

"Oh, my gosh, Laura—*no!* Don't be an idiot! Of *course* I'll do nothing of the sort! Marry a man for whom I care nothing, just because another woman is in love with him? Laura—you're—you're—a *nut!*" she gasped, vigorously. "I couldn't do anything like *that!*"

"No, I suppose you couldn't!" admitted Laura reluctantly. "Oh, Caroline, string him along for a little while, *please!* I—like him—I think he's—terribly interesting! Will you, Caroline?"

"Oh, I suppose so, Laura—you're an awful baby, aren't you? But you usually get your way!" Caroline said,

with an unwilling grin; for, despite their frequent arguments she had become fond of the girl.

SO Charles went out of Caroline's life like the closing of a door on all that is beautiful and happy and to be desired. And the Prince became almost a member of the household in the tall, narrow house in East Sixty-Seventh Street. Mrs. Van Tuyl, with a very slight tightening of the lips, made no objection; nor did she ask again about Charles or his status with Caroline.

The Prince and Laura talked. The Prince and Caroline dined, danced, went about together; Caroline always questioned with the shrewdness of a cross-examining attorney when she came home from one of these trips.

And then one night the Prince brought things to a climax.

The big drawing-room was lit only by firelight. Bowls of roses and fragrant valley-lilies were about the room, spilling their fragrance into the warm air. It was a perfect setting for a proposal.

With a little sinking of her heart, Caroline realized that one was coming. Frenziedly, she cast about in her mind for some saving remark, but before she could speak the Prince broke the little silence.

Trembling violently, her hands icy, Caroline read the letter through and knew that she had been betrayed

"Caroline, I have something to say to you; but before I say it I would like to tell you a little story." Caught by his tone as much as by his words, Caroline waited, interested. "It is the story of three women and a boy—a family of

aristocrats who had never known anything but luxury and all that means. They were driven suddenly forth from their homes, sent penniless into the world. Three heroic women kept a boy in ignorance of their destitution, going hungry, cold, comfortless so that that boy should have a chance. They ask only that he make it up to them by marrying a woman of wealth, so that he, the last of their name, should have wealth befitting his rank and social position."

He waited a moment, and Caroline felt her throat contract with the vividness of the picture he drew so simply, so clearly.

"The three women, Caroline, are my grandmother, my mother and my sister. The man—myself," said the Prince. "The woman whose fortune is to repay that sacrifice and who in turn will have a social position that should more than compensate for what it may cost—is—yourself!"

"Oh—but—" began Caroline, incoherently.

The Prince sat down beside her, making no effort to touch her.

"I know this is all quite unpardonable; making a cold-blooded business proposition of a proposal of marriage," he told her, in his voice a tense note of something like pain. "But I cannot bring myself to pretend that it is a love-match. I honor you—I respect you, but I will not pretend that I am madly in love with you. I love some one else. Some one whom I may never have. But I give you my word that if you marry me, I will do everything in my power to make up to you for the lack of love."

"Oh, please—please—wait! Can't you see I'm trying to tell you something?" wailed Caroline. "I—I—can't marry you. I'm poor—terribly poor. I work for my living—I am merely a companion to Miss Arden!"

The Prince's dark face changed, his eyes lightened a little.

"But I was given to understand that you and Miss Arden were cousins—joint-owners of this so great fortune!" he pointed out.

Caroline told him the story.

When she had finished the Prince sat for a long moment quite still, his face an inscrutable study. And then suddenly, he laughed bitterly, harshly, and buried his face in his hands.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" he whispered, sharply. "What a joke! What a—hideous joke!"

Caroline was startled.

When Prince Ivan looked up his face was haggard.

"It is the great joke, eh, Caroline?" he asked, still in that harsh, ugly voice. "I told you that I could not offer you love—because I loved some one else? You will laugh when I tell you that it is she, the little Laura, whom I love! I can never speak of love to her; she is so fragile, so like a little white flower upon which the warm, bright wind of love must never blow! It is funny, eh? God, but it is funny!"

CAROLINE sat quite still for a moment, staring at him with wide, puzzled eyes. She supposed she should despise him; yet he had been so honest; had told her, quite simply and with no appearance of shame, why it was necessary that he marry for money.

She could see those three pathetic women—the grandmother, the mother, the sister—hungry, cold, proud, unflinching in their determination that the last of their race should have his chance.

After all, if Laura married this man she would be a princess. There would

be ancestral castles; probably rented out now to rich Americans so that the income could keep the Prince in clothes and pocket-money while he sought the rich wife who would restore them to their former glory. She knew now the meaning of the soft glances Laura had given the Prince.

Suddenly she spoke.

"Would it interest you to know that Laura cares for you?"

The Prince flung up his dark, handsome head, and in his eyes was the look of one who sees the gates of Paradise swing open.

"She—cares—for me?" It was a whisper.

Caroline told him. And as she talked, the Prince's dark face glowed with a glory too wonderful for words.

"She is all there is of life to me; so little, so frail, so dependent. I would carry her in my arms around the world, and count myself the most blessed of men. I would even turn against those who have sacrificed for me—to have my little princess in my arms!"

Caroline supposed it was silly to accept without question the simply spoken words of a self-confessed fortune hunter, but the Prince had been so open and aboveboard. When he had thought her an heiress he had asked her to marry him, but he had made no pretense of loving her. She could not but appreciate his honesty in that, and it made her quite willing to believe him now.

She stood up and held out her hand to him.

"Come to-morrow at three, and talk to her. And then, if she says what I am quite sure she will say, talk to her physician. I have a hunch that everything's going to be glorious for you two! It would take more than an operation to down Laura, once she knows that you love her and want her to marry you." And she saw him go off with the look of a man who is treading on nothing more substantial than rose-tinted clouds, with the harmonies of the heavenly spheres ringing in his eyes.

IN her own room Caroline made ready for bed slowly, stopping now and then to sit lost in thought. Funny—one man had proved himself a fortune hunter and she was quite sure she despised him. Yet another man had *confessed* himself a fortune hunter—and she couldn't help but admire him! The difference, of course, was that one man had pretended to be a lover, and under cover of kisses that had been heartbreakingly sweet had tried to marry her because he had thought her rich. The other man had been quite frank about it, and his honesty had won her admiration.

She dropped off to sleep, at last, tired out by the problem—

IT must have been very late when she awakened, because the moonlight lay pallid across the floor of her room, with the pallor that means that dawn is very near. At first she lay quite still, puzzled to know what had awakened her. And then—

Her heart gave a sickening jump of terror as she became aware of a faint white shadow that leaned above her, unspeakably weird and eerie in the faint moonlight.

A ghost? The flowing white draperies, the stillness of that white clad figure with the unbound hair, the silent menace of the whole apparition.

She clenched her teeth to keep them from chattering. And then—the faint moonlight glinted on something else—glinted and shivered away, as though afraid of that slim-bladed knife shining in the uplifted hand.

The old Italian dagger that Caroline had often seen in use as a letter-opener on Laura's dressing-table!

Now the apparition leaned a little lower, fingering the dagger. A beam of moonlight touched the face—the eyes wide, fixed—the eyes of a sleep-walker! The apparition was Laura—moving in her sleep! Handling an old, very sharp Italian dagger and murmuring:

"I hate her—I hate her—she has taken him away from me—I'd like to kill her! So that she could never again take him—"

Caroline lay tense, bathed in cold perspiration, sick with horror. All that she had ever heard of the danger of suddenly awakening somnambulists swept over her. Yet, too, she knew that people in the grip of some dream may do hideous things.

If she moved, might she not cause Laura to strike that one terrible blow that would undoubtedly prove death-dealing? If she awakened her too sharply, might she not drive the girl into hysterical insanity?

She fought with all her strength to down her rising panic, and spoke with a degree of calmness.

"Laura!" Firmly, clearly, distinctly, without raising her voice, but with a tone of command that reached to the girl's brain. "Laura! Do you hear me? I have something to tell you! Listen to me, Laura!"

Over and over again—monotonous—recurring—until the hovering apparition relaxed a little, and a fretful, whimpering voice said:

"Of course I hear you, Caroline—what is it? Why are you worrying me?"

"Ivan loves you, Laura! Do you hear me? Ivan loves you! Ivan loves you!" said Caroline, still in that monotonous voice with its note of command. She lay perfectly still, rigid beneath the satin coverlet, not daring to move, her fascinated eyes on the curly blade of the sharp-pointed Italian dagger.

Laura grew rigid. Her eyes opened. With a little caught breath the Italian dagger dropped to the floor and Laura put dazed hands to her eyes.

"Ivan loves you, Laura!" Caroline said again. But Laura cried out:

"That's a lie—he doesn't—he doesn't, I tell you! He loves you! That's why I hate you!" she cried, and began to sob, with great, choking sobs that shook her thin shoulders.

Caroline sprang up, flashed on the lights and caught Laura by the shoulders.

"Laura, don't cry like that, dear. I tell you that Ivan *does* love you—dearly! He's coming to-morrow to tell you so. And Dr. Jenkins says when you are a little stronger there can be an operation, and then you'll walk—be well and strong!"

Laura was wide awake now, the brain-saving tears raining down her face as she clung like a child to Caroline, begging again and again for reassurance that Ivan really cared for her. She had not dared to hope for this; she had been so sure that her illness had put her beyond the pale of any man's love. Yet now Caroline was telling her that Ivan loved her just as she was—frail and helpless—and that there was a chance that she might be well and strong and really his wife.

Suddenly, Caroline pushed the girl back into the wheel chair, and stared at her with blazing eyes. "Laura—*who got you out of bed—who helped you into that chair?*" in a voice that was sharp with a hope that she scarcely dared admit.

"Why—why—I don't know—I was—asleep—nobody—*Caroline!*" Laura shrieked.

For a stunned moment the two girls stared at each other.

"Laura, do you realize that for years you have been lifted in and out of bed? That you have been helpless to get yourself into that chair or out of it? Do you mean to tell me that you did it yourself, unaided, to-night?"

Laura was shaking like a leaf, her face white, but her eyes blazing like stars.

"Caroline!" she whispered, sharply. "Caroline— *did I?*"

"Well—your night nurse would never have put you into that chair and sent you in here to try to murder me, Laura—so it's reasonable to suppose you did it yourself!" said Caroline, seeing the other girl's nearness to hysteria and forcing herself to speak in a voice as nearly casual as she could manage. "Laura—can you stand up?"

Laura was shaking with excitement, hope.

"I—I don't know!"

"Try it! See if you can get from that chair to my bed—into it!" commanded Caroline, tensely.

Laura put her shaking hands to her face, fighting for self-control. Then with a determination that caught at Caroline's pitying heart, she wheeled the chair beside the bed, put her two hands on the arms, tugged a little, set her two feet against the bottom of the chair. She did not stand erect—she was not strong enough for that—but she did manage to drag herself from the chair to the bed, proof that the paralyzed lower limbs were no longer completely paralyzed, that returning health and strength had crept into the girl's body so stealthily that none of them had suspected it.

She lay, spent but bright-eyed, among the covers of the tumbled bed.

"Tell me again—that—he loves me!" she whispered, shyly.

And Caroline laughed, softly, tenderly—

V

IT was almost dark the next afternoon when Dr. Jenkins faced Caroline in the library. He was smiling happily.

"Well, I find that everything is just as we would have it," he told her, beaming. "I hoped that giving her something new to think about would help us to build up her health and strength. At her age you know it's only natural that there should be hope. She will be able to stand an operation and I feel confident that she will be as strong and well as ever in her life. Especially, now that she and that handsome young Prince have such splendid plans. Love works more miracles than we doctors dream of, child!"

When he had gone, Caroline went up to her own room.

As she passed Mrs. Van Tuyl's door a voice called to her.

"Caroline? Will you come in for a moment?"

"Of course," murmured Caroline politely, but without enthusiasm.

"I have been having tea with my nephew," began the older woman, watching Caroline's face intently, and catching the little flicker of feeling that sped swiftly over it. "He tells me that he asked you to marry him, and that you refused!"

Caroline stood up.

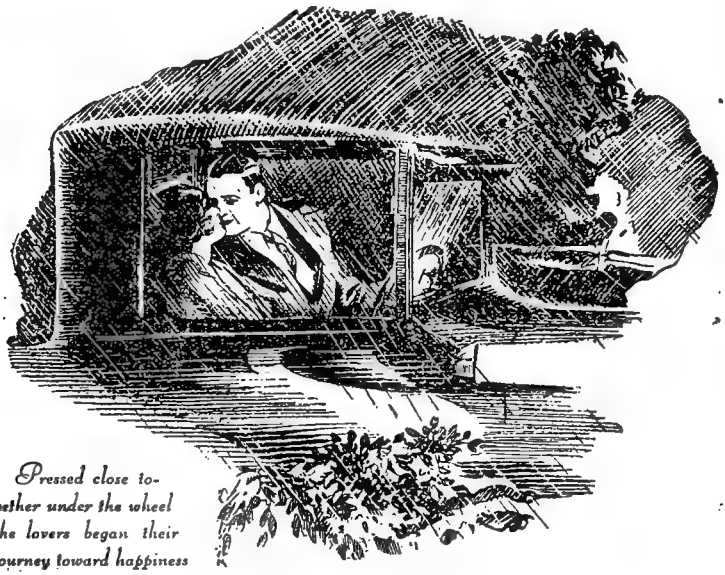
"I'm sorry, Mrs. Van Tuyl, but I do not wish to discuss—" she began, hotly.

"If you please, Caroline, I have a feeling that I am somewhat concerned

in this. I would appreciate it very much if you would talk this over with me. You can at least tell me whether *I* have had anything to do with your refusal to marry Charles. He was so sure that you cared."

"Mrs. Van Tuyl, through no fault of my own, I saw a letter of yours to Charles congratulating him on having the wisdom to fall in love with a rich girl, instead of a poor one. And since I am absolutely penniless, I thought it would be unkind of me to marry him!"

"In other words, you considered Charles a fortune-hunter—and beneath your contempt!" It was a statement, rather than a question. As Caroline did not deny it, she burst out hotly, "Why, you silly little idiot—Charles has had a dozen chances to marry girls ten times richer than Laura Arden! He has known from the first that you were merely Laura Arden's companion, without a penny to your name. A girl who met you here recognized you as a former model of Cecile's. Charles would never have asked you to marry him if he had thought you were rich. He has too much pride—although he's making about five thousand a year, and has brilliant prospects.



Pressed close together under the wheel the lovers began their journey toward happiness

She looked at Caroline with frosty, hostile eyes.

"When I saw how deeply you had hurt Charles—how much he loves you—how sure he is that the whole world, so far as he is concerned, has come to an end—I could find it in my heart to hate you! If it wasn't that I love Charles so much that I'd have to be fond of you because he adores you so!"

"Where is Charles?"

"In his apartment!" snapped Mrs. Van Tuyl crossly, and gave her the number of the street.

"Thank you!" said Caroline, and bent lightly to kiss her on the cheek.

And then she was gone.

VI

IT was raining. A cold, Autumn rain that splashed drearily against the windows and ran down, making a grayish curtain that was unspeakably depressing. It was only a little after seven but Charles had had an unwanted meal that passed for dinner, and he was sitting humped in an uncomfortable chair, a pipe that had long ago gone cold between his teeth, an unopened book on his knee, his eyes, grim and unhappy, fixed on space.

There came a knock at the door. Possibly the landlady with the late mail. Without turning his head, he growled, "Come in." He heard the door open—heard it close—waited a moment—turned his head sharply with the realization that somebody had come suddenly, almost breathlessly into the room.

For a moment he was quite sure that she was a figment of his imagination. She stood so still, her eyes were so starry, her cheeks flushed as though from the cold.

"Caroline!" He whispered it, as though afraid speech might drive her away.

"My dearest!" answered Caroline, very low, not very steadily.

And then he knew that she was real. With one stride he was beside her.

"You said that if ever I saw you again I'd have to come to you—and I have!" she told him, unsteadily.

He turned his head until his lips were upon her own, and his arms tightened about her until each breath that she drew was an agony, but not for worlds would she have had that agony lessened by the loosening of his embrace.

"My dearest—if you could know how I have missed you—"

"I don't see how you could keep on loving me when I was such a beast to you!" she pointed out. "I'll try to make up for it. May I, Charles?"

His gesture pushed all the hurt and the ugliness and the pride into the background. He put a cheek against hers.

"There's a nice old fellow in Greenwich who doesn't mind a bit being routed out of bed at any hour to marry a man to the girl he loves. Don't you think it would be great to get into my car, drive up to Greenwich, and have that fellow marry us to-night?"

"A brilliant idea!" she carolled, joyously, and then, sobering, "Oh, Charles—darling—do you—are you *sure* you—want me?"

Charles laughed. "Lord, you scared me! I thought you'd changed your mind!"

"Never! The world won't last long enough!"

"Then why are we wasting precious moments?"

In the coupé, with the cold Autumn rain outside and Caroline held close in one arm, Charles bent his head, his eyes adoring.

"Darling—I love you!"

"And I adore you!" said Caroline.

"Then it's on to Greenwich!" chanted Charles, happily. The self-starter roared and the coupé turned its nose into the road that led north.

And pressed close together beside the wheel two lovers, for whom all happiness loomed ahead, began their life together.

THE END

He set his lips on hers in a kiss that bound them each to the other for always

Dazzled Heart

Another girl took her lover and brought heartbreak to Honor—until she learned an age-old secret of men

By VIOLET GORDON

SHE loved him so much—which is never very wise.

They were almost engaged. Twenty times Cameron had trembled on the brink of a declaration. But Honor had always drawn back from the big moment. She wanted to prolong the sweet danger of playing with fire. Once the fire burns, you are initiated. Kisses become matter-of-fact, no longer romantic, mysterious—as when Cameron pursued with flame and mischief in his eye and Honor fled like a will-o'-the-wisp, teasing, provoking, or else let him catch a flying kiss on the ear.

But she delayed too long. She had known this ever since Leonore Ward came to Gardenville.

Leonore was a wonderful girl. There could be no possible doubt of that.

Honor was attractively plain, with a sweet wide mouth, a snub nose kissed with freckles, a wild rose skin, hair that would neither curl nor lie in place, feet that were fleeter than they were small, hands that were kinder than they were slender.

While Leonore was lovely as a dream. Her hair defied the elements. Its natural heavy waves were like finest black satin; her eyes were great brilliant pools tangled with shadows. Her clothes were the achievement of money and skill. Beside her, Honor felt hot and awkward.

And worst of all—Leonore was sweet and kind, gracious as a queen.

"She gives me a pain," said Molly Drew viciously. "I could never trust any one as perfect as that."

"Molly, that's silly." Honor refused to gossip. "She's just naturally gorgeous. A few people are. I think—"

"Dust it!" growled Molly. "I don't want to hear your thoughts. I can think better ones myself. You can't deny Leonore's curving her polished claws to snatch Cam from you."

Honor's heart was not as brave as her words. "I haven't seen her do a single thing except be herself, and she can't help that. Besides, I'm not engaged to Cam."

"Yes, you are. It's been understood for ages even if you haven't come right out with it. Hasn't Cam told you he loves you?"

"Oh, but that's nothing. Boys tell girls they love them while they light a cigarette—and forget them while they flick off the ashes. I have no complaints to file. It's just the way things are."

"Honey," said Molly, "if I didn't know you so well I might suspect you were a saint, and I'm here to announce I don't like saints. Take it from me, little one, that line doesn't get you anywhere."

Honor forced a smile and changed the subject.

She did not feel saintly. She felt crushed, beaten, incompetent to meet the most trivial situations. And Leonore was always so quick to help her out. That was hardest of all, for it placed Honor in a false light.

There was the time of Mabel Collins's dance at the Country Club—Mabel was Cameron's sister and Leonore's hostess and former boarding school chum.

Honor and her mother, who lived on a small annuity, had sat up half the preceding night to make a new dress. It was made from a remnant of turquoise blue chiffon picked up at a bargain counter, and the shade was charming with Honor's wild rose coloring and hazel eyes.

"I look—almost pretty in it," she told herself wistfully when she was ready for the party.

Molly and Jim Crane called for her and she felt almost happy. But when she reached the Country Club her heart sank.

Leonore was unbelievably beautiful in spangled green that made her look like a dark-haired wood nymph. Every man in the room was dazzled. She shot like a star—cool and brilliant—from one adoring embrace to another. Fifty solid young heads were completely turned.

So anxious were the stags to cut in on her that half of them would not take a chance with any one else as partner. The dressing room was crowded with feverish-eyed girls who declared they were "so tired," or it was "just too hot dancing," or the makeup was "all wet these days. It simply won't stick."

Cameron danced with Honor once, told her absently how nice she looked, and then appeared to forget her. She would have been with the other girls in the dressing room had it not been for Willie Sears, a pathetic, yellow-haired fat boy who was the butt of the

local wits, and who was humbly grateful for any notice.

He took her to supper, and to her dismay she found herself near Leonore and Cameron. She could see that Cameron was as embarrassed as she was. But not Leonore.

"Hello, Honor," she called, when Willie had gone refreshment hunting. "Isn't this jolly we're in the same supper bunch? I've been watching you all evening."

"Watching me all evening? Whatever for?"

Leonore's smile was knowing, full of little lights. "You and your star dancer," she teased. "Why, you've knocked the poor boy cold."

For an instant Honor's sweet temper flared. She could have killed Leonore when she saw the mocking, funny smile in Cameron's eyes.

"You want to watch your step, Honey"—this was a school nickname, a shortening of Honor—"don't get too gay with high voltage like Willie. It isn't safe."

Before she could retort Willie returned, joy bursting his tight little skin because she was being nice to him. How could she turn on him when he was such a poor lonely soul? Willie and she were in the same boat. She smiled at him through a mist.

A hand squeezed her arm. She turned to find Molly, coldly, comfortingly furious.

"Don't you dare to stand up for her this time! That dame's so catty she kneads the pillow before she purrs herself to sleep. She didn't mean to be sweet that time, did she?"

Leonore had raised her glass, meeting Honor's eyes.

"Sting-O," said she slangily.

"Scratch-O," said Molly loud enough to be heard.

"Oh, do be quiet," Honor whispered.

THAT night she did not sleep. She lay awake blinking hard at an electric arc light. Her heart felt tight, as though in a little while it would burst. But she would not give way. Her mother would notice red-rimmed eyes. Her mother, she suspected, was already unhappy enough. She had asked too anxiously about the party. It had been hard to give a bright account of it.

The next day was Saturday and she had promised Willie, in a weak moment, to let him drive her into Lowell, a seaside place fifteen miles away. It had seemed mean to let him save her program and then turn him down.

She had been waiting for him on the veranda when a car drove up. Honor could hardly believe her eyes when she saw Cameron.

"Hi there, Honey," he called. "Come out for a spin. Great ole day—great little car."

He looked almost too handsome in his light blue shirt, his head thrown back in that careless way above the open collar, his auburn hair ruffled. The sight clutched at Honor's throat so that she could hardly speak.

"I'm sorry, Cam, but I can't. I'm going to Lowell."

"Well, I'll be slapped on the slim white wrist! Who's driving you?"

She had to tell him. At any minute Willie might come along.

"Great gosh—a flock of goshes," said Cameron. "What's got into you, tearing 'round with poor old Skinny? Fallen in love or anything romantic?"

"Wouldn't it be amusing if I had?" Some of the bitterness crept out. "And what makes you so bright? Can't I take a trip to the sea?"

"Sure." He avoided her eyes. "Take a dozen if you like." Willie's car came whizzing round the corner. "Guess I'm blocking the traffic. S'long." And Cameron was gone.

Honor, feeling hysterical as she met the joyous vacancy that was Willie's smile, was about to join him when her mother called her to the telephone.

"Hello, is that you, Honor?"

She was amazed to hear Mabel's voice. It seemed as though the Collins family were not neglecting her today.

"Is Cam there?" Mabel seemed nervous.

"No, he's just—"

"Oh, Honor, I've got to say something right now. Don't for mercy's sake let him know I'm here. It's for your good as well as his I'm speaking."

"What in the world do you mean?"

"I'll tell you—though it seems awful to talk over the phone. Cam's gone up there to ask you to marry him."

"Mabel, you're crazy!"

"No, I'm not. It's just like him. He thinks he owes it to you—running round with you the way he used to."

Honor, stiffened like a drawn bow string. "If you have anything to say," she returned coldly, "please be quick about it."

"I will. It's for your own good as I said before. Honor, he's head over heels in love with Leonore, but he won't propose to her till he's asked you. He's that sort of boy. Just the same, I warn you if you accept you'll be sorry. Men always hate wives they've taken on from a sense of duty. You'll—"

"Do be quiet." Honor was outraged through all her sensitive little being. Her pride was ground in the dust. "Cam's gone—and he didn't propose. So you needn't worry."

She slammed down the receiver and ran out.

All the way to Lowell she was hectically gay.

"Say, you're some kid!" was Willie's stock note of approval. He said it hundreds of times.

They swam; they went on the Ferris wheel and to the laughing mirrors; they ate salted peanuts and danced in a funny little crowded room where you dropped a nickel in a slot for jangled music. Then later in the afternoon Willie took her for waffles and coffee to a quiet tea room curtained off in booths.

Honor was tired. She let Willie ramble through a string of overworked jokes till suddenly she noticed an odd expression in his eyes. He leaned across the table and whispered excitedly:

"Honey—guess who's in the next booth?"

She listened.

"—stalled long enough," a man's voice was complaining. "If you're tired of me, say so. Otherwise we announce our engagement as soon as you come home."

"Heavens, you sound like a husband already," a faintly displeased voice objected. "There's plenty of time."

"There isn't. You're too keen on other men, Leo—and that's no rabbit stew. But I'm no girl's tame poodle, and if you want me, you've got to come through."

"Sweet sorrow—the man's wielding a club! But so long as you know we're engaged, Tommy, what does it matter?"

"Just this much: you've got an idea you can't live without a dozen hanging flirtations. I'll bet right now you're having one with that Collins

girl's brother. That's why you wouldn't let me go to the house for you. I'll bet they all think you ran into town to see a dentist."

"Don't be absurd, Tommy—and don't be so everlastingly serious."

The waffles were finished. Honor slipped from her seat followed by Willie. He was bursting with pent-up excitement.

"Did you get that, Hon? It was Leonore Ward. She's engaged to that fire-eater and she doesn't want Cam Collins to know it. What do you make of it?"

"Willie, we must never, never tell what we've heard. It might make awful trouble."

"Sure—I'm safe." Though plainly disappointed, Willie squared his shoulders. "But if Leonore's fallen for Cam and she's just kidding this bird along till she makes sure of her luck, it isn't so good. Cam's some sheik, and I guess she knows he's got a bunch of money coming to him some day. Sure she knows it. Honey, it doesn't seem fair to let a good fellow soak himself with a two-timer like that."

"But it isn't any of our business."

"Aw say, Honey, how do you get that way?"

ALL the way home in the squeaky roadster, Honor bit her lips, tears pricking her eyes. Her thoughts came at her like yapping dogs.

Cameron's love that had seemed so sure—delicate but strong as cloisonne—life pelting her with its brightest flowers—the young laughter that had rippled in her heart. Then Leonore—and all the beautiful things flitting away. Honor like a broken thing, trailing wings in the dust.

Mabel needn't have been so cruel. She might have trusted a girl not to accept a man who proposed from a sense of duty.

"I think we should tell him, Honey," Willie timidly persisted. "It doesn't seem square."

"But we can't. It isn't done, Willie. He wouldn't believe us, and he might think I was—oh, please let's not talk about it!"

He got her home in time for dinner. She felt she should invite him in, but couldn't bear to. Instead, she asked him if he would take Milly Blake a book she had promised to lend. Milly was a shy little girl who, Honor suspected, might not find it too difficult to be kind to Willie.

"Cam called up a few minutes ago," her mother startled her by saying when she flew in. "He said he wanted to see you to-night."

Honor said nothing. Her mother hesitated, and then burst out with some heat:

"Honey, that Leonore girl's out of town to-day. I heard it by accident. Don't let Cam amuse himself with you just because—"

Honor choked her off with a great bear hug. "Darling," she laughed shakily, "you're the cutest little mother I ever had!"

She was waiting, outwardly as serene as a young goddess, when he came shortly after dinner. Cameron flopped on the veranda step beside her and rolled a cigarette, grinning.

"Had a wild party this afternoon?"

"I'll say I had. Absinthe cocktails behind an iron grille. You should have heard Willie give the pass word."

"My money on the plump boy. Willie's the teachingest lad I know to learn a girl her hot cakes."

"Don't make fun of Willie."

"He's lovely. But I didn't come to talk about him."

"No?"

"Not a bit." He drew on his cigarette till it was glowing fiercely. Then:

"Honey," he blurted out, "I came to ask you to marry me."

Just like that.

Though it was a warm night, sweet with jasmine and California broom, Honor felt as though the Arctic had opened its gates and blown the frosts of all the ages across her shoulders. She shivered.

"You're usually strong on repartee, Honey. Can't you think up an answer to that one? I asked you if you would marry me."

Honor drew a long breath. Her voice came bleakly through it.

"Yes, Cam—I will."

He reached forward, touched her hand. "Do you mean it?"

"Well, why not?"

THE engagement did not at once become public property. Honor did not even tell her mother; while Cameron broke the news to his family with the injunction to keep it dark for a while, at Honor's wish.

But of course Leonore heard, and her visit was abruptly terminated. She had a letter, she explained, calling her home. She had had such a lovely time—she only hoped that when she had her own place, which would be soon, she would be able to give Mabel as good a time. Oh, yes, she was engaged to Tommy Matthews. Hadn't they guessed something of the sort? It would be announced soon; so it didn't really matter if she told such good friends.

As she laughed her silver chime, Mabel, recovering from her stupefaction, thought more leniently of Honor. Then, because she was the sort of girl who must confide things, she told Molly Green the whole story.

Molly flew with it to Honor.

"Think of that pussy being engaged all this time and making such a dead set at Cameron! But gosh, Honey, I'm glad it's all fixed up with you. Of all the shocks! Come here and get yourself kissed."

Honor had turned pale. "Mabel shouldn't have told you. Oh, Molly, promise you won't repeat it."

"Of course I won't if I mustn't. But you just about make me ill, old girl."

Honor coaxed her back into a good humor and finally got rid of her. Then she sat down and wrote the letter she had been planning for days.

It was to Cameron, breaking off their engagement. She told him, quite simply, that she had accepted him only to protect him. She told him of the conversation she had overheard at Lowell.

As an old friend, Cam, I did for you what I would be glad any girl to do for a brother of mine. It was sporting of you to ask me to marry you, though not necessary. But since you did, I took advantage of it to keep you out of a mess. You see, you wouldn't have believed me if Leonore hadn't told the truth at the last.

From the beginning I intended to release you as soon as she announced her engagement.

Don't try to see me, Cam. I'm going away for awhile—leaving to-night. It's much better. Try to understand and forgive me.

HONOR.

Beneath the eaves of the little cottage was a fairly large attic furnished as a den. Honor's father, Dr. Moore, had used it in his lifetime. And now Honor hid there, and cried out her heart.

By day she tried to keep busy, helping her mother with sewing, doing any-

thing to keep her hands and brain occupied. But when night fell and she was sure her anxious little mother had fallen asleep—then everything was different.

The mask was discarded. Grief would sweep her like a hurricane. She loved Cameron—every dear thing about him. The way his hair grew to a peak on his forehead; the way he smiled and frowned; the way he walked; the tobacco he used, those bumpy rolled cigarettes. And she had been forced to renounce him: for no man loves a duty wife. But oh, it hurt! More and more the weight crushed down.

"I love him so!" she moaned.

She had had to hide from him for fear she would weaken. He would pretend he loved her—to play the game. An absence of two weeks would work wonders. There had been no money for her actually to go away, so she had hit on this plan much against her mother's wishes. But once she had given in, Mrs. Moore was willing to help.

When Cameron called to ask where Honor was, Mrs. Moore, whose hearing was not acute, became suddenly stone deaf. She misunderstood everything he said, and sent him away mightily confused. She did the same with Molly, to whom Honor had written a hasty good-by note.

Wednesday night came, and Molly telephoned to ask Mrs. Moore to go with her to a new talking picture. Honor's mother at first refused, but Honor insisted that she should go. The doors would be locked. She would not answer the bell if it rang. It would be fun. She had a new magazine to read. See—the quiet had already done her good. She was beginning to be quite happy.

At last, with a few misgivings, Mrs. Moore left.

IT was dreadfully still in the house, not a sound anywhere except the faint tap, tap, tap of the big eucalyptus tree against the eaves. A soft sweet breeze blew in at the open window.

As time passed it seemed the breeze grew stronger. The bough of the eucalyptus ground itself against the sill. Outside it had become dark. Honor, who had been trying to read, suddenly felt an unbearable desolation steal over her. She dropped her head on her arms across the table, and sobbed miserably.

A board creaked on the floor. Something in the sound startled the girl. She had a queer feeling that she was not alone. Thrilling with fear she raised her head and stared toward the window.

A man was swinging himself in from the tree. He raised his hand pleadingly to stop her scream.

"Honey, don't be scared, dear. I'm coming to you—I can't keep away. But you mustn't be frightened."

It was Cameron.

"How did you get in?" she gasped.

"Up the tree with a pair of spikes. Darling, I had to come. Molly guessed you were here. She suspected it the day she came to see your mother. Then after I'd watched these windows last night I was sure."

"Cam, go away! Oh, I hate you! Go away—I won't talk to you. You have no right—"

She was too wildly upset for coherence. He strode toward her and she tried to fight him off. But Cameron paid no attention. He caught her in his arms, held her struggling close against him.

"You don't hate me. You love me—though not as much as I love you."

"Love me! As though you could! Wait till I see Molly! Getting mother off to a picture—putting you up to this!"

"She didn't. I planned the whole thing myself. You mad, crazy baby—did you think I wouldn't fight for you?"

"Leave me alone—this is too much! I'll scream."

"Honey, let me speak. Give me a chance—"

"Why should I? Stop kissing me, Cam. I detest kisses. It was torture enough after I said I'd marry you—"

"You acted that way," was the grim reply. "You notice I didn't try it again."

"But you did. You're doing it now—"

"Yes, and I'm going to keep right on doing it every day till you learn to like it. You might as well make up your mind, Honor, that I'll never give you up. You're my girl and you always will be."

"Of all the nerve! Why, you don't even mean it!"

"A lot you know what I mean. Now I'll kiss you again. There!"

This time she did not struggle. Instead she broke into tempestuous weeping. But still he would not let her go.

"Honey—Honey, be kind to me! I never stopped loving you. Why, I couldn't. I can explain if you'll only try to understand. They say no girl can really understand a man, but you're different—you have a brain. Try, dear, will you?"

Quiet now, she watched him. "It won't make any difference. But go on."

"Darling, don't say it won't make any difference. It *must*. Listen to me. Do girls ever dream about a wonderful sort of fellow—you know, the fairy prince kind that seem too handsome and perfect to be possible?"

"Why—I suppose so."

"Sure they do. Every girl does. But what they can't get into their heads is that every fellow when he finds himself growing into something like a man, has the same dumb sort of dreams. He builds a picture of some imaginary lovely lady who would be the natural mate for your fairy prince. Well, Honey, I met a girl that looked a little like my old cuckoo fancy. I didn't love her, but I was dazzled. I admit I made a darned fool of myself. But as it never went deeper than my imagination, surely you're not going to spoil both our lives because of it?"

"You — you *did* love her. You couldn't see me when she was around."

"Honor, I hunted everywhere to take you home the night of the dance. But you were gone. The next morning some one said to me—never mind who—something about marrying this dream girl. Why, Honey, I woke up like the man who rolled into Niagara. I said:

"'You must be crazy — you know Honor's the only girl I'd every marry.'

"And then I got a terrible scare you wouldn't have me. You know how I rushed out to you the day you went to Lowell. Then that night I wanted to explain—to tell you how sore I was about the whole thing. But it seemed like an insult to you. So I just blurted out the straight goods—would you marry me."

"Because you thought you owed it to me!"

"Duty be hanged, Honor. It never came between you and me. Why, I had hardly ever kissed so much as your ear. You wouldn't let me. I can't see

how on earth I owed you anything."

"But you did love her," said Honor stubbornly. "I could see it—the way you looked at her."

She could feel his heart throbbing against her—the tenseness all through him. He pressed her away, forced her to meet his eyes. They were dark, agonized.

"Did I look like this, Honey?"

Peace, like a fragrance, stole into the room and to a troubled heart. No, she had never seen Cam look at any one like this. But was it true that men were always haunted by a boyhood dream of beauty? If so how could she, who had no beauty, hope to hold him?

"No, you mustn't think that," he cried, reading her thoughts. "I'm a grown man now, darling. That sort of bunk can never hurt me again. Dearest and most precious—isn't my girl's heart big enough to understand, to forgive, and to keep on loving—if ever she did love?"

Honor gave a little cry. Glory touched her eyes as she held out her arms.

That was her answer. All that Cameron needed. His kiss on her waiting lips was a prayer of thanksgiving.

One Little Bride

LITTLE Bride, they weep for you,
Coming down the aisle;
On your face a holy look
And a tiny smile.

Wives and mothers watch you go,
Tear drops in their eyes.
"Silly of them, isn't it?"
You think, calmly wise.

Little Bride, it's not for you
They are weeping tears,
But the little brides *they* were
In their yesteryears!

Beatrice Ashton Vandegrift

The Timid Vamp

Bashful Winnie finds that it isn't always safe to kiss a strange man—even if he doesn't want you to

By CHET JOHNSON

LITTLE Winnie Lane blushed and dimpled. Bill McGurk was kidding her again, of course.

"Suppose I should get the habit—rushing up to strange men in public and kissing them!" she laughed.

"That's your problem, sister," grinned McGurk. "I'm only trying to get out a newspaper, not starting a school for girls. But you heard what I said about that picture. And I don't mean perhaps."

"But—you're not serious, Bill?" pleaded Winnie. "Really, you—Bill! Don't ask me to do a stunt like that!"

"I'm not asking you—I'm telling you," corrected McGurk grimly. "You and Joe Herman trot down to Mills Field, and if you're not back here before home edition art dead line with a close-up of Miss Winnie Lane kissing Jimmie Jaynes, the Flying Kid—! Better move along. He's due there in less than an hour."

McGurk swung around to his desk and began pawing at copy. Winnie knew arguing was useless. Pictures were the important part of the news to McGurk. "One good, snappy action picture is worth two pages of dead type," was his creed. Certainly there had been no better picture idea for months than this: she, a *Herald-Star* reporter, kissing Jimmie Jaynes, the girl-shy young flyer who was speeding back to San Francisco after the first transcontinental non-stop round-trip flight. But—to have to kiss him—a stranger!

Winnie was trembling and tears were near as she followed Joe Herman and his camera from the city news room. Behind her she heard jibes:

"Give him one of those two-minute Greta Garbos!"

"Don't choke him, Winnie!"

Herman, still grumbling, put his equipment in the back of his rather seedy-looking coupé and wiggled his corpulent figure into an uncomfortable position between the wheel.

"Can the weeps, baby," he advised. "You'll never get by in this game until you develop some confidence. All you gotta do is act tough!"

"That's all this assignment is—acting tough!" flashed Winnie. "Making a fool of myself! I'm not going to do it!"

"Sure you are," counseled Herman. "You're going to be the first girl that has kissed this young fella since he became a second Lindbergh!"

Winnie was still trembling when they reached Mills Field. She always trembled when the city editor of her paper sent her out on stories. All her life she had been timid. And hope of overcoming this was one of the reasons she had taken up newspaper work the year before.

McGurk had given her a year of difficult training. He had made a "stunt reporter" of her. It was Winnie's daily job to produce a light, illustrated feature. She wrote a breezy style that lifted the yarns out of the rut of ordinary news. And she photographed well. "Winnie Rides With the Fire Chief," "Winnie Serves as a Traffic Cop," "Winnie Tries Deep Sea Diving"—these and other personal experience stunts had been almost torture, but she had gone through with them. And the "Winnie yarns," as they were termed around the office, went over big with the public.

Still she remained timid.

"I can't understand it," McGurk often wailed. "She don't know it, but she's got nerve. Some day that little girl is going to develop a grouch for a change, and when she does—somebody'd better look out."

Now for the greatest stunt of the series. Winnie shuddered as she thought of the headlines: "Winnie Kisses Jimmie Jaynes!" "Dimpled *Herald-Star* Reporter Breaks Down Resistance of Sky Girl-Hater," or something like that.

"Oh, I hate the whole business!" half sobbed Winnie. "I wish I'd never thought of being a reporter!"

"Great game, isn't it?" agreed Herman.

THEY crowded through the police lines and joined the crowd of privileged characters on the cement runway in front of the hangars. City officials, army and navy flyers, reception committees, police, and the usual young army of reporters and photographers, standing in little groups, talking, nervously watching the dull, gray sky out over the bay.

In a few minutes something would

come out of that haze — a pale blue monoplane with a grinning youngster at the controls, and another great chapter in the history of aviation would be completed.

Winnie buttoned her sport coat around her neck. It wasn't so cold, but she was shivering. Joe Herman, his camera all set, waddled away from her, greeting acquaintances.

"Some day a fly is going to sneeze near Winnie and scare her to death, Joe," she heard some one say to the photographer.

"Aw, pull in your claws," grumbled Herman. "She's a good little kid, when you get to know her."

Winnie knew there was nothing vicious in what Milly Briggs said. Just an older head's comment on a youngster who never had become "one of the gang." Winnie was conscious of the truth of the remark. She had tried to mingle with others, tried to be friendly, tried to talk their breezy language, but always her shyness worked against her. She knew hardly half a dozen reporters on other papers.

"I need confidence, as Joe says," thought Winnie. "Why wasn't I born hard-boiled instead of a mouse? Why doesn't anything ever happen to make me real mad, just for once?"

She jumped as a siren sent a moaning wail over the field. That was the signal that Jimmie Jaynes's plane had passed over Oakland Airport, across the bay. In a few minutes he would arrive.

Idling groups became frantic with excitement and activity. Police began pleading and struggling with the crowd. An ambulance and a fire engine rolled out on the field. Reporters ran to special phones; others, with photographers, strayed out as far as police would permit, ready to race for first pictures and first interviews. The shrill cry of a youngster came above the hum of the crowd:

"There he is! Look at 'im!"

There he was. A tiny speck of blue barely visible against the curtain of gray. A little less than fifty hours ago he had waved good-by to another crowd. Since then he had been to New York and back again, with only a few hours sleep while his mechanician relieved him at the controls.

Now the Blue Eagle was almost over the eastern side of the field, its three motors humming joyfully. It circled the field, to the accompaniment of a roar from the crowd, then glided toward a far corner.

"Steady, now, kid!" muttered Joe, although he was experiencing the same emotions that made Winnie gasp and tremble as she watched the big man-made bird come home after its epochal flight. "Grab him the first chance you get! I'll have the old box aimed and ready to shoot!"

There was a mad rush, and Winnie found herself beside Joe in the midst of an excited mob racing out to where Jimmie Jaynes's Blue Eagle was rolling along the field. Winnie could see his head, poked out of a cabin window.

Jimmie Jaynes looked weary. But he was grinning, for he had known he must expect a good-natured mobbing if the flight were successful.

"Hey, hey, fellows! How about giving me room for a little stretch before starting the third degree?" he called as he clambered from the plane. The newspaper crowd fell back a few yards. This flying kid had a persuasive way. Besides, it allowed a good opportunity for pictures.

"Look this way, Jimmie!"

"Hold that pose, brother!"

Winnie gave Herman a fearful

glance. He had his camera cupped in his hands, head half bent over it. His eyes flashed: "Now!"

Winnie was never able to recall exactly how it happened. In a second she had stepped up to Jaynes. She stood on her tiptoes, and, before he knew it, wrapped her arms about his neck, drew his head down and kissed him upon the lips.

Herman snapped the shutter of his camera and Bill McGurk's picture scoop was recorded.

Silence. Not just ordinary silence, but the grim quiet that comes only when people see something they hardly believe.

Winnie stepped back, barely conscious of what she was doing, her heart beating madly, her soft lips burning with a fire she never before had felt. Jimmie Jaynes stood still, staring dumbly. Winnie could only stare back into his glowing eyes. He seemed dazed, unable to understand.

Winnie felt weak. She wanted to say something, she tried to move her lips, but no sound came. Her cheeks were hot. Some one called out:

"You got kissed at last, Jimmie! And right before the camera, too!"

It dawned on him that he had been tricked, and suddenly his anger, that had been stilled by the shock of Winnie's warm lips against his own, flared up. Time after time he had declined to pose with girls. He said such pictures would only start rumors of romances. He was interested in flying, not girls. Now the world would enjoy a good laugh at his expense! Jimmie Jaynes, touted as girl-shy, stepping from his plane after the greatest flight in history—and being kissed by a girl he'd never seen before!

He glared over toward where the wise crack had come from. His usual good nature, frayed by the ordeal of the flight, left him.

"Good joke, isn't it? Laugh, all of you! I stick up for fifty hours. Then I come down, try to treat you folks white, and you pull a stunt like this!"

The group shifted its eyes from Jimmie to Winnie. And Jimmie looked with them.

"Well, are you satisfied?" he grated. Winnie attempted a smile, but made only a twisted, pitiful little grimace. She knew she must say something. She sensed that torturing silence would continue until she spoke.

"I—I'm so sorry—I—"

Jimmie laughed harshly. "Yes! You're tickled to death! I suppose you'll get a raise in pay for this! All right! Now you can go back and tell your boss you're the first girl that ever made a fool out of Jimmie Jaynes!"

Joe Herman, who had ducked out of the group to give his camera to Benny Purcell for safe-keeping for the moment, elbowed his way back.

"Aw, don't get all burned up, Jimmie!" he growled. "What's the difference?"

"The difference is," stated Jimmie, "that when I get kissed out in front of a crowd I want to be kissed by a real she-woman, not some gushy, mushy, silly little sob sister!"

"You tell 'em, Jimmie!"

"Don't blame you, kid!"

Winnie felt her body becoming rigid. A strange emotion swept over her. She forgot the crowd. Forgot she had been terrified a moment before. For the first time in her life Winnie Lane was mad. Good and mad. No one ever had talked like that to her before. Kidding might make her blush and feel timid. Ordinary sharp language might cause shyness. But plain, brutal talk like this—

A brand new Winnie Lane stepped up to Jimmie Jaynes again and met his gaze.

"Big boy!" she stormed at him. "You're nothing but a spoiled, overgrown baby! I kissed you because I was ordered to, just like I'd go out to Golden Gate Park and kiss one of the bears if that was the story I was told to get! Don't think you've been 'mushed over!' Any girl who'd mush over you should consult a psychiatrist! You may be a good flyer—you're no sheik!"

SHE whirled and broke through the group, then half walked, half ran blindly across the field to where Herman had left his car.

Oh, that she should have let him see how his kiss had affected her—should have looked for one long, dazed moment into his eyes! She hated herself. He was justified in everything he had said! Well, there was one consolation, she would never, never see him again.

They were nearly back to San Francisco before Herman, who had been chuckling and gasping, boomed:

"Winnie, I didn't know you had it in you!"

Winnie, who had been sitting taut and silent, burst into tears.

"He's right, Joe. You know he's right!" she sobbed brokenly. "I had no business doing that, making a fool out of him. After he'd been risking his life."

She was still sobbing when they returned to the office. But Joe Herman was in high spirits. He whooped as he burst into the city room.

"Hey, Bill! We got it! Wait till you see this one! Man, it was worth a million dollars!"

He puffed and wheezed an account for the entire staff. "Don't ever tell me this little girl is shy—she's an Amazon at heart!"

Bill McGurk scowled and pounded his desk.

"He got sore and talked like that, did he? Insults a member of our staff, huh? Say, we'll show young Mr. Jaynes a thing or two! Bat out the story, Winnie! Start it out something like: 'Girls, I'm disappointed. I've just kissed the great Jimmie Jaynes!' Then rattle along for about a column that way, see? Make it light and airy! You don't need to get too rough with him. Just kid him along!"

"Oh, Bill! I can't write anything like that!" protested Winnie. "Because he's right, in a way, after all. I wish I'd never—"

"Nonsense! You've put over the big picture of the year! C'mon, pull yourself together and write the story. And end it up this way: 'For the actual pleasure of kissing, with all due respect to Jimmie Jaynes's achievements as a flyer, I'd as soon kiss one of the prominent residents of the Park Aquarium!' That's a good line, huh?"

For five minutes Winnie sat at her typewriter, tapping out a few words nervously, then x-ing them out. Nothing seemed right. She kept seeing a pair of glowing eyes on the paper in front of her, feeling a pair of lips—

Bill McGurk became impatient.

"Let me get there! Run along and have lunch, Winnie. You look badly. I'll bat out the kind of yarn we want."

A few hours later, having managed to break away from a reception committee in the rotunda of the city hall, Jimmie Jaynes flopped down on a bed in the St. Francis Hotel. Before sleeping for a few hours he would see what the papers had to say about his flight.

Jimmie felt restless, irritated, and it was not entirely because of the strain of the flight. He pawed through a pile of papers until he came to a *Herald-Star*.

The big headlines, of course, were on the completion of his trip. Under them, in the center of the page above a picture that made Jimmie's blood boil, he read:

WINNIE KISSES JIMMIE JAYNES

By Winnie Lane

Girls, I'm terribly disappointed!

I've just kissed Jimmie Jaynes, the handsome kid flyer.

There's been talk that he might go into the movies. Take it from me, he'll never go over very big as a screen lover until he takes a course in fancy osculation.

You know how lots of us have wondered how it would feel to put our arms around such a nice boy's neck and kiss him. That's just what I did to-day, right after he landed at Mills Field.

I expected to be thrilled. I wasn't. It was just like kissing a great-aunt.

There was more along the same line. The article ended:

Yes, Jimmie Jaynes is a great flyer. I'll admit that. But when it comes to the gentle art of kissing—

Honestly, girls, little Winnie would just as soon kiss one of the handsome residents of the Park Aquarium!

He hurled the paper to the floor. Then he picked it up and read the article again.

"The brainless little flapper! Still trying to make a sap out of me! I'll give her something to think about!"

Jimmie jerked open the drawer of a writing desk and took out pen and paper. He forgot that he had had little sleep in more than fifty hours. The pen scratched and hurled ink as he began writing with vicious slashes and jabs. Forget her eyes. Forget her soft, red, crushable lips— For half an hour he wrote, read over what he had written, made a few corrections. The *Herald-Star's* most vigorous rival, *The News*, he knew would be glad to help him.

"Will you get me the city editor of *The News?*" he barked into a telephone. "Hello! City editor? This is Jimmie Jaynes! Yes, it's me. I'd like to give you people a statement about that—that business down at Mills Field this morning. I've got it written out. Sure, I can read it to you. All ready? Here goes:

I understand, from reports in an afternoon paper, that I was kissed this morning when I completed my cross-country flight.

That is news to me. Kissing is something that should be enjoyed by the principals involved. I regret that I missed the pleasure referred to in this rumor.

I cannot understand how such a report started. It seems that if any one kissed me I should have been aware of it. There is a dim memory of being approached by some immature girl soon after I stepped from my plane.

Perhaps some one got the idea that she kissed me, or tried to kiss me. That is a ridiculous rumor. I guess I should know when I'm being kissed. And I haven't had anything even remotely resembling a kiss since I took up flying.

"Get that all right? Fine! Can you use that in the rest of your editions this afternoon?"

"You bet we can! Thanks, Jimmie. That business this morning was so obviously a *Herald-Star* stunt that nobody else gave it any notice. But this is a good statement. We'll shoot it in the next edition, going down in about four minutes. Much obliged. Any time you have anything else to give out, *The News* will be glad to get the first crack at it."

Jimmie smiled with satisfaction and lay down again to sleep. And sleep

finally came, but not until he had lain there an hour, thinking of a girl in a brown sport coat and a red hat, a girl with brown eyes, brimming with tears one minute and flashing fire the next. Whose arms had been around his neck and whose lips—

"Anyhow, no little sob sister is going to make a fool out of me and get away with it," he mumbled sleepily and fiercely to this vision.

THERE was a riot in the *Herald-Star* city room when the next edition of *The News* was brought in.

"Whoop! Rally round and gaze at this!" shouted Tom Wiley, whose job it was to check over the opposition papers. "See what 'ittle Jimmie has to say. G'wan! Get your mitts offa this paper! Break away and I'll read it to you."

McGurk alternately roared with glee and pounded his desk.

"It's a fight he wants, is it? Boy, we'll give it to him! The kind of stuff the public eats up! We'll keep Winnie and this guy brawling on page one for a week! Let's see, what 'll we sock at him to-morrow? It's too late to do anything to-day."

"There's the big civic banquet at the Palace to-night," said Wiley. "Why don't you send Winnie down there? She could write a yarn on the boy I kissed as an orator."

"That's an idea, Tom! He probably makes a rotten speech. We'll have Winnie kid him about being even worse as a speaker than a kisser, or just a little bit better— Ah, here she comes now! Feeling better, Winnie? 'At's the stuff! Sit down here on my immediate left and we'll go into a conference! Now, here's what I've got in mind—"

Winnie felt less tremulous. She had gone to her apartment feeling as if the world had toppled over on her. A good cry had lifted some of the weight. A sleep had helped even more. And then she had begun to think over the scene again, and to feel madder and madder.

"It wasn't such a terrible thing for him," thought Winnie. "I told him I was sorry, and it wouldn't have hurt him to be a little decent. 'Silly little sob sister!' I don't care if he was tired. He didn't have to be insulting. Perhaps he's sorry now for what he said to me!"

She voiced this latter thought to Bill McGurk.

"Yeh? And perhaps he isn't, Winnie. I guess you haven't seen the last edition of *The News*. He must have run over there and sobbed on their shoulder. Look at this!"

She read Jimmie's statement, big brown eyes wide and red lips parted. "Some immature girl." "Haven't had anything even remotely resembling a kiss."

"Oh!" gasped Winnie, and pounded with her tiny fists at the desk. "That's a terrible thing, Bill! I'm 'some immature girl,' am I? Is that so! We'll see about that, Mr. Jaynes! Bill, I don't know what's the matter with me. I—I'm getting mad again. I can't remember feeling like this in all my life until to-day. And I think I'm madder now than I was this morning!" Her eyes snapped fire, the luscious scarlet mouth drew tight. "If I was a man I'd go down and—and paste him one on the nose!"

McGurk leaned back and beamed. Didn't the little girl have nerve, just as he'd always said? Well, now! He went ahead and told his plan. And Winnie, "getting madder every min-

ute," as she thought over Jimmie's statement, nodded her brown bobbed head in vigorous approval.

"It 'll work out grand!" predicted McGurk. "The boss has a ticket for a seat at the main table, probably close to the speakers, but he doesn't want to go. Here's the ticket, Winnie. Remember, you don't have to say a word, but—I've got a hunch we're going to give that fresh kid something to think about. Plenty!"

"We will!" promised Winnie grimly. "Don't you worry about me going through with it, Bill. I feel like I was going to stay mad the rest of my life! He's going to have a sweet time tonight! And little Winnie—'immature Winnie'—is going to show him what a good time really is!"

She stalked out like a tiny, infuriated tigress, while McGurk and Wiley fell on each other's shoulders with joyful whoops.

"She'll do her stuff, all right!"

"You bet she will! Take one of these shy little dolls and just get 'em good and mad!"

Jimmie had strange misgivings as he was escorted from the St. Francis Hotel by a delegation of high-hatted dignitaries to a blue limousine, and raced, with a squad of motor cycle police clearing the way, to the Palace Hotel. He found difficulty in taking part in the conversation.

"Wonder what's in the wind?" he thought. "I feel just like I did a few minutes before I cracked up that time at Crissy Field."

"—certainly took a nice, good-natured wallop at that girl on the *Herald-Star*," some one was saying. The others laughed. Jimmie didn't feel like laughing.

"Yes," he said vaguely, "I guess you'd call it that."

Jimmie took his place in the center of the speakers' table, between the mayor and the Governor. Again he glanced around, seeking the cause of his unrest in that sea of friendly faces and stiff shirt fronts. Admirals and generals, commanders and colonels, flyers in uniform and flyers in civvies, consuls, civic leaders — and a brown-haired girl in a pink dress. Her head was turned away as she chatted with some one beside her. She sat on the opposite side of the table from Jimmie, eight or ten chairs to the right. He gave her only a passing glance. Probably the wife or daughter of some prominent citizen.

Jimmie listened listlessly to the welcoming speeches. He wished he could look more pleased. Here were fellows he knew, fellows in his game, who were belittling their own accomplishments and lauding his. And here was Jimmie Jaynes, trying to be attentive and appreciative and failing to be either, letting his mind dwell on a mysterious something that he could not fathom. He wondered when that feeling would cease. Absently his gaze rested on a brown head, a pink dress.

At last he found himself standing up, fighting for words as the applause died down. Silence came. Expectant silence. Two thousand eyes on Jimmie Jaynes. Two thousand ears waiting. He cleared his throat, moistened his lips.

"Mr. Mayor—Mr. Governor—ladies and gentlemen: I wish I could tell you how much your—kindness—your friendship — means to me and — and how glad I am to be back here—"

What was the matter with him, anyway? In college he had been rated a fairly clever speaker. Yet here he was gulping nothing but dull bromides.

"—back here—in San Francisco!"

A sympathetic listener in a far corner brought relief in the form of applause. The crowd smiled indulgently. Jimmie cleared his throat again, and tried to put some confidence in his voice and some life into his speech.

"The flight was easy. Nothing compared to what Ernie Smith, or Warner, or Les Maitland did. All we had to do was sit there and let the ship fly itself. But I want to tell you we certainly felt like cheering — we felt like cheering—when we felt the ground of your airport, Mills Field — under the wheels of our plane this morning, and then clambered out—and—"

Suddenly the words stuck in his throat. He found himself looking into two brown eyes. That girl in the pink dress, where had he seen her before?

"—and then clambered out of our plane—and—"

Why was she watching him so intently? He tried to look away, but couldn't. He felt hypnotized. Desperate, he tried to go on.

"—We got out of our plane—and—"

THE girl in the pink dress leaned forward, just an inch or so, and —puckered up her lips! Jimmie Jaynes suddenly saw not a girl in a pink dress, but two brown eyes, two pleading eyes in which there was the hint of tears, looking at him from above the tightly buttoned collar of a fuzzy brown sport coat and from under a little red hat! So that's who it was!

"And then—" called out a voice from the press table. "Yes, yes! Go on, Jimmie!"

"—and then—you gave us—such a welcome—" Still those eyes held him. "—Such a welcome as we—never dreamed—you'd give us—such a welcome!"

It was terrible. He knew it. Awful! The worst speech he'd ever made. And now he understood that strange feeling of something about to happen.

She was sitting there for no other reason than to laugh at him. To heckle him without saying a word. Just to stare at him, pucker up her lips and make a fool of him—again!

"I'll forget she's here! I'll not look her way again!" thought Jimmie. But he did. And once more Winnie puckered up her adorable lips, then shook her head. She seemed to be saying: "You're absolutely hopeless." He looked away and almost shouted:

"Our motors worked perfectly during the entire trip! We had no trouble of any kind! The weather was fine! We ate the first of our sandwiches over Reno!"

He had counted on a story of the flight being the most graphic part of his speech. Here he was shouting it as if he were announcing dull statistics that demanded noise to make them at all interesting. His face was red. He jerked his arms frantically. Jimmie Jaynes was badly rattled.

In an effort to relieve his embarrassment, hundreds of eyes were turned away. But two brown ones remained aimed squarely at him; two eyes that seemed to smile sweetly. Yet he knew that sweetness was feigned, a disguise for disgust, anger, or both. If she'd only look away long enough for him to get his mind out of the nosedive into which it had plunged. If she'd only stop puckering up her lips every time he looked at her!

But Winnie was out for revenge. She was getting it, and she was going to make it last.

He talked and shouted on wildly. And the wilder he became the more satisfied was the smile on Winnie's face. He tried to glare at her. But she only smiled back—and puckered up her lips. Jimmie decided he must wind up his speech quickly.

"—Sorry I'm not good at making—at this sort of thing—but I'm just a flyer and not a—"

Winnie's lips formed a word plainly, although no sound came. And Jimmie Jaynes, control gone, heard himself repeating that word, shouting it: *"Sheik!"*

For a moment the room was silent. Then came a ripple of laughter that swept into a roar. Most of the crowd had read Winnie's (or rather, McGurk's) story in the *Herald-Star* and Jimmie's statement in *The News*. The laughter only became louder as every one looked at Jimmie and realized that his mind or his tongue had slipped just long enough for that one word. He tried to smile, but it felt as if his face were frozen.

The same terror was clutching Winnie. The silent heckling had been planned. But forming her lips into that word "sheik" had been purely spontaneous. She had intended that for Jimmie, alone, with never a thought that he was fishing so desperately for words that he would repeat it. Now, just what had she done? Sought to give this tall, black-haired man a silent spanking. And here was turmoil.

The awfulness of it came to her. Jimmie Jaynes, the nation's newest air hero, was standing in the midst of a howling, gibing crowd. He had come here to be honored, and he was being ridiculed.

Similar thoughts must have been running in Jimmie's head. He sat down, then stood up again and tried to finish his speech. But he was greeted only with laughter and a hundred shouted, kidding questions.

Laughing at him, were they? Why? Because of that girl! That fresh little reporter! She was out for revenge,

was she? Well, she'd had her revenge. Now it was his turn.

He kicked back his chair and walked quickly around the table to where Winnie sat. She stood up, uncertainly, one hand on the back of her chair, the other nervously touching her chin. She waited, breathless, trembling.

"Ladies and gentlemen," shouted Jimmie. "Perhaps some of you think this little girl and I were serious today in our exchange of pleasantries through the papers. Really, we were not. In fact, we're the best of friends, aren't we, Winnie?"

She knew she was beaten, and she was gloriously afraid. Back again was the tremulous, pleading feeling. What was he going to do or say next?

"You bet we are! Winnie likes me so much that she's been sitting here all evening making faces at me! She's had a good time, haven't you, Winnie?"

Now both his hands rested lightly on her shoulders. Then they gripped her more tightly. The hot blood rushed through her at his touch.

"Please!" whispered Winnie. "Please don't—"

But there was a relentless gleam in Jimmie's eyes.

"—She's had a lot of fun, folks!" Jimmie knew he was doing something he'd regret later, but a sort of madness was upon him and he could not stop. "And now I'm going to show her just how it feels to be surprised this way before a crowd!"

His hands dropped from her shoulders and his arms went around her. He drew her close, close, his lips sought hers—he kissed her. Not a swift kiss like Winnie's of the morning, but a long, lingering, breathless kiss such as she never had known. There was a flash as Joe Herman stood up, one foot on a chair and the other in a salad plate on the table, and shot the picture.

"Laugh that off!" jeered Jimmie as he released her. "That makes us about even!"

Suddenly he sickened of his revenge. Winnie stood there, swaying a little, eyes wide, lips parted and trembling. There was a strange look in her eyes, in her heart tumult.

"Yes, that makes us even," she said in a low, vibrant voice. "Mr. Jaynes, you're the first man who ever insulted me, and you're the first man I ever —hated! Good evening!"

She turned quickly, her little head proudly erect, eyes straight ahead, and walked out through lanes of now silent revelers.

The banquet was broken up, those who had come to honor sensed that the kindest thing was to leave. Jimmie still was standing there, gazing at nothing, while a few of the official hosts stood about, when the last guest left.

IT was a good story for the morning papers. They made the most of it, even though Winnie was on the staff of an afternoon paper. National heroes —and certainly Jimmie's flight earned him the right to that rank—do not kiss girls at banquets every night and then hear these girls say: "I hate you!" Winnie found herself as much sought out for interviews as Jimmie.

"Say something, say anything, Winnie, even if you are on the *Herald-Star!*"

"Do you really hate him, Winnie, or were you just peeved?"

And to this question Winnie, besieged in her apartment as soon as she arrived there in the taxi she had taken when she left the banquet, replied:

"I was just peeved."

"Then you don't hate him?"

"I don't hate anybody," countered Winnie.

"How about the old wheeze that love and hate aren't so far apart? I'll bet you really like him, don't you?"

Winnie felt her face becoming pink.

"Don't be silly," she said, trying to make her voice sharp. "Don't keep teasing me about this. I know you'll have to write a lot of stuff, I'll probably have to do the same. Only just give me the best break you can."

"Don't worry, kid! You're one of the gang."

One of the gang! It was the first time she'd ever been referred to that way. At least she'd gained something from her public humiliation. And it was good to have them so friendly. Winnie felt she'd "arrived" at last, in a way.

"How about some coffee and cake?" she burst out. "If you can wait a few minutes we'll throw a little party!"

It was a gay affair. Even Milly Briggs enjoyed it.

"Joe Herman was right," she confided to Cleo Brannon, of *The Times*. "She's a good little kid when you get to know her."

Another group that had stormed the St. Francis was shooting cameras and questions at Jimmie.

"I'm too tired to answer questions," he pleaded. "But I'll give you all the same statement, and you can use it any way you want to:

"I made a fool of myself down at the field this morning. No excuses. Maybe I was feeling a little too brittle after the trip. But I bounced off the handle. I'm ready to make a public apology now. And I acted like a sap at the banquet to-night. I'm sorry. That's about all I can say. Except this: From now on James L. Jaynes is going to leave girls alone and stick to flying!"

Winnie slept only fitfully. Pitching about in bed she took turns hating Jimmie and feeling sorry for herself. She tried not to think of that long delicious moment when he had held her in his arms and kissed her. Yet she thought of that most of all. She tried to call Jimmie a brute and a ruffian. But she found herself recalling a tall, clean-cut man who was gentle even when he had held her so tightly. Her whole body seemed burning.

"I wonder what I'll have to write about last night?" she thought. "I can't turn out one of those kidding stories like the one Bill McGurk wrote. I wonder if he believed me when I said I hated him?"

A few minutes before six o'clock her telephone bell began jangling. It was Arthur, the early-shift office boy.

"Bill McGurk wants everybody down as soon as possible! There's a big story breaking!"

She was on her way in a few minutes. A bellowing newsie came through the street car and Winnie bought the extra: "Arsenal Blast Perils Hundreds; New Explosions Threaten East Bay Cities!"

There were just a few details. The huge government arsenal across the bay had been the scene of a terrific explosion an hour earlier. Cities for miles around had been shaken. Fire had broken out in many parts of the arsenal, which covered hundreds of acres. There was no estimate of the number of dead or injured, but the toll was expected to prove heavy. New blasts were occurring as the flames spread to warehouses and munitions dumps that had escaped the first explosion.

Already the office was in a turmoil. Reporters were yelling into phones. Bill McGurk was roaring orders.

"Try the sheriff's office in Contra Costa County again! There must be somebody who knows just what's happening. Anybody get hold of a plane yet? Hullo, Winnie! Stick around until I find out what I want you to do."

McGurk stopped roaring long enough to sigh:

"Winnie, don't let 'em ever make you a city editor. It 'll drive you crazy. Look at this arsenal yarn! Biggest disaster since 1906, and we can't get anything definite on it. Can't find any one who's actually been near enough to tell us what that mess over there looks like. I wish I was a seagull. We've got to get somebody over there by air, some way. Every other paper has grabbed off a plane, and we're out on a limb! Say, Winnie, you're getting famous. Yes, I was there last night. You did your stuff beautifully!"

Winnie interrupted:

"Bill, do I have to write another Winnie yarn about last night?"

"Maybe for the home edition. But right now all the world is interested in, and all we've got room for, is this arsenal story. Lord! If I only knew where—"

One of the boys called from a telephone:

"Bill! Frank Lynn, down at the field, says he may have a plane in about an hour. No pilot, though."

McGurk was a volcano again.

"We'll get a pilot! H-mmm! Winnie, looks like it's up to you. Take a cab to Mills Field. Then grab the first bird you see who knows one end of a plane from the other, and hop across the bay. Have him fly you as near as possible to the arsenal, then land at Oakland or Concord and phone us how it looks. Graphic stuff, kid! Like looking down into hell and all that!"

As Winnie was bounced around by a hilarious taxi driver who promised her "I'll give you a ride down to the field you'll never forget", she found herself thinking not of the big story, but of Jimmie Jaynes.

"What's the matter with you, Winnie?" she scolded herself determinedly. "Get him off your mind. He's nothing but a story to you. And you're nothing to him but a silly sob-sister. You've had your revenge and he's had his. Call it quits. Forget him. You may never see him again."

And that, even in her excitement, brought the queer little ache again to Winnie's heart.

The driver swung out to pass another car on the Bayshore Highway, a few miles from the field. He opened the throttle, and the stubby cab, unused to being treated as a speed car, swayed and reeled wildly. Winnie screamed: "Not so fast!"

The plea was too late. She heard the shrill sound of metal scraping metal. Then the cab spun around. Its fat tires shrieked through loose gravel. It reeled crazily for a moment, then slid from the road, down a low embankment, and flopped on its side.

Winnie had slid to the floor. She was a little dazed, but not injured. Some one was helping her out.

"Steady, now! You seem to be all right." Whose voice was that?

Winnie blinked—and looked into eyes that drove all other thought away. What was Jimmie Jaynes doing here? She tried to clear her thoughts. The world was spinning. She blinked and swayed again. Suddenly she jerked

away from the strong but gentle hands.

"Let me alone, please!" she said coldly. "I'm all right!"

"Of course you are! Say, isn't it funny that wherever I go I seem to run into you?"

"I suppose you think I was following you!"

"No, I don't think anything like that."

"Well, I wasn't!"

"Listen, Winnie—"

"Miss Lane, if you please!" she told him frigidly.

"I beg your pardon. This is the first time we ever met outside of a crowd. Can't we get along for a few minutes without fighting?"

"I'm certainly not trying to start a fight."

"I didn't mean that. But I thought, perhaps— Have you read the morning papers? No? Well—you might be interested in reading what I said—about last night."

Winnie gave him a withering look.

"Really, Mr. Jaynes, I'm not the least bit interested in anything you say for the papers. I can imagine what it would be, after the things you've already said and done. And so far as last night is concerned—I'd forgotten entirely about it."

He stared at her, perplexed. What a strange, adorable combination of mouse and tiger. Tears one minute. Claws the next. Jimmie wished he knew more about the ways and moods of brown haired and brown eyed girls. Particularly about the ways and moods of this girl.

"Anyway," he said, "I suppose you're headed for Mills Field, Miss Lane. I'm going there, too. Got to see how they're getting along with the motors. Unless the idea is too terrible to you, why not let me take you on in my car? It seems to have nothing but a dented fender. And you'd only have to endure my company for a few minutes."

"Thank you, Mr. Jaynes, that's very kind of you," said Winnie in her most formal tones.

Neither spoke for the rest of the trip. Winnie sat there, boiling. Jimmie gave her side glances and marveled how so much rage could emanate from such a small person. There was the ghost of a smile on his firm lips when he stepped from the car and opened the door for her. Winnie wanted to look past him, ignore him, but curiosity won out.

"What are you thinking about now that appeals to you as funny?"

"I was just thinking," began Jimmie slowly, "that last night I held you in my arms—and kissed you!"

"I ought to slap you for that!" hissed Winnie. "That's just what you need!"

"What you need, young lady, is a good spanking!"

"I suppose that's what you'll try to do in front of a lot of people, the next time we meet."

"If I have anything to say about it, we'll never meet again anywhere!" lied Jimmie.

"Which would suit me perfectly!" flared Winnie.

He walked away toward the hangar where mechanics were tearing the Blue Eagle's motors to pieces to determine how they had stood the long flight.

LYNN met Winnie as she neared the field office. "I was just watching you two. You'd make a great pair, even though you do seem to snap at each other all the time," he grinned.

"Don't be silly! He's nothing but an overgrown boy. Have you a plane

for the *Herald-Star*, Mr. Lynn? McGurk sent me down to—"

"Yes, there's a plane here. A two-seater RX-10. Belongs to Ace Abbott. He's out of the city, but he left word that if any one wanted to rent it it would be all right, providing I let a good pilot take it up. They've been working on it, tinkering with the valves, I think, and just finished awhile ago. That's it over there. The orange one. Dandy plane, Miss Lane. Can you fly it?"

Winnie laughed as she walked over to the RX-10. "I wish I could. We've got to get a plane over there and see what's going on. Couldn't one of these men working around here take me across?"

Lynn shook his head. "I'd thought of that, too. But it just happens there's not a licensed pilot in the bunch. Maybe some one will show up— Say! What's the matter with us? Worrying about a pilot when there's the world's greatest over there!"

"You mean—him?" gasped Winnie.

"Sure! I'll bet he'd be glad to take you up. Hey, Jimmie!"

"No! No!" begged Winnie. "Don't call him, please, Mr. Lynn. I wouldn't ride with him. And he's mad at the *Herald-Star*. You know we've been kidding him."

"He doesn't mind that sort of thing, Miss Lane. Oh, Jimmie! Can you spare time to take Miss Lane across the bay? She wants to be flown somewhere near where the arsenal is blowing up."

Jimmie sauntered over, folded his arms and looked at Winnie as if he'd never seen her before.

"I'd be glad to take this young lady—"

"Immature girl," corrected Winnie.

"—but you see the condition the Blue Eagle is in."

"How about taking up Abbott's RX-10?" went on Lynn, unaware of the storm he was helping develop. "It 'll be all right with him."

A telephone bell called him back to the office. He returned in a few minutes, to find Winnie staring in one direction and Jimmie in the other.

"Your boss calling, Miss Lane," said Lynn. "I told him I thought you'd be on your way with Jimmie Jaynes in a few minutes, and he's tickled to death."

"Oh, now you've done it!" sighed Winnie. "Now I am in a jam! Well, Mr. Jaynes, I'm forced to go through the motions of asking you if you'll fly me over in that plane. Of course, the *Herald-Star* will pay you whatever you consider your service is worth."

Jimmie looked at her, then gazed at the RX-10. He shook his head.

"Nothing doing."

"Why?"

"It's dangerous business, flying a strange, single-motored plane over a place that's blowing up like a battlefield."

Winnie waited a few minutes before she spoke.

"I see. You're just a little bit afraid?"

"Yes. For you. I'd take my chances alone," he told her sternly.

"And I'll take mine without any advice from you, Mr. Jaynes! I'm sorry we bothered *you*. I guess I'll have to wait here until some—*man*—shows up!" Their eyes met and battled.

She was walking away when he called:

"All right! Hurry up, if you're going with me!"

He walked to the RX-10, climbed into the cockpit. Lynn called to a

ground crew, the plane was shoved out on the runway and the prop twisted until the motor barked eagerly.

"Where do you want to land?" snapped Jimmie as Winnie found herself being helped into the plane and donning helmet and goggles. "Over the arsenal and then to the nearest field? Good. Here, put this parachute on."

"I don't want it."

"You've got to have it," broke in Lynn. "Field rules. I'll show you how to work it."

Jimmie cleared the motor until it warmed up and began humming smoothly. Winnie, sitting ahead of him, turned and started to say something.

"Turn around, Miss Lane. It isn't necessary to talk to the motorman."

The motor roared, the RX-10 shivered, and then raced down the field. Winnie never had been up before, and she experienced a peculiar weakening terror as the wheels left the ground and the plane climbed out over the bay. At first the scenery below held little of interest. She only felt a sudden helplessness, a yearning to be back on the ground again. But as the plane skimmed along the bay shore, soared high over the ferry building, and then headed over Goat Island, confidence began to return.

Once she half turned and glanced at Jimmie, his face partly hidden by helmet and goggles. His lips were clamped together tightly, but Winnie was certain she saw a faint smile, and she found herself smiling back.

A feeling of keen happiness surged over her. Gone were the tilts and worries of the last two days. And gone, she realized, was the urge to flare up at Jimmie Jaynes upon the slightest provocation. Now they were away from crowds and cameras. This was his world. She liked it.

"And I — *like* — him, too," she thought. "You like him a lot. You've just been trying to keep up your silly pride. And perhaps he's just been doing the same."

She sensed, rather than heard, Jimmie calling to her. He pointed to the right. Winnie looked and shuddered. There was what she had come to see. A grim, smoldering expanse of low hills. Jimmie banked around and dropped the plane lower. Details began to take form. Here a cluster of buildings ablaze. There an isolated warehouse also in flames. Now and then a puff of smoke and débris hurled high as the flames touched another store of explosives. It was, as Bill McGurk had predicted, "like looking down into hell."

For ten minutes Jimmie circled over the disaster scene. Then he shouted and motioned over his shoulder. Should they go back? Winnie nodded. She had seen enough to phone a word picture to the *Herald-Star*. And that was all the assignment called for.

The RX-10 swung around and headed again for the bay. Then Jimmie decided Oakland airport would be the best bet. He turned south toward the hills, intending to fly through a gap in them.

WINNIE gave little notice to the return flight. Her thoughts were on the black-haired man behind her. She knew she should be mentally writing her story, but a warm glow pervaded her. Little thrills ran over her, her pulses throbbed strongly. How silly she had been to think she hated him! One could love such a tall boy—but why think? The happiness of the moment was enough.

She did not notice the breaks in the hum of the motor, nor feel the slight dipping and jerking of the plane.

Jimmie worked frantically. He'd felt that first miss. He knew it meant others would follow. A glance at the instrument board confirmed his fears. The oil pressure indicator hand was barely registering. A leak in the line somewhere.

Just as he started to call to Winnie, the motor barked a staccato farewell and died. Winnie turned. Jimmie was looking over the sides, picking out a landing place. There was little choice. Nothing below for many miles in any direction but rolling foothills that mounted to the rugged range of which Mount Diablo was the peak. He knew that a forced landing could mean nothing but a bad smash. He had only a few seconds.

"Jump!" he shouted to Winnie, pointing to the parachute pack on her back. "Quick!"

Already the RX-10 was swinging down in a wide, circling glide.

"Jump! Parachute!" shouted Jimmie again. Terror such as she never had known before should have come to Winnie. Instead, she felt strangely calm. The downward glide was smooth. There seemed no tragedy in the air. Whatever was coming, Winnie did not dread it.

"We're going to smash! Jump, Winnie! You'll be all right! Count three or four and then jerk the ring!" he pleaded.

"What about you?" cried Winnie.

"I'll take a chance! Hurry! Jump, for God's sake!"

Everything was clear to Winnie. He had sought to dissuade her from this flight. She had taunted him. He had thought of her safety. She had sneered a hint of cowardice. Now he was begging her to take the only step that might save her life. He was going to stay with the plane, knowing the chances of pulling through alive were about two in a thousand.

A lot of things went through Winnie's mind in those brief seconds. A lot of emotions swept over her. And she made a quick decision. She'd not quit him now. If death was waiting down there she was ready to meet it. He saw that determination in her eyes. Between them flashed a look of understanding—and love. When life was certain they had known only antagonism. With death so near they knew.

Winnie choked back a little sob. It didn't seem fair. She loved him so!

Now the plane was so near the hills that a parachute jump would have been fatal. Jimmie headed for a tiny field on a hillside, hardly more than two or three acres of open space. There was a farmhouse near by, a man, a woman, and some children running around, looking up excitedly. Nothing now but the whistling of air past the plane. A few seconds more and—

As the wheels touched the edge of the field, Jimmie jumped from his seat, leaned forward and sought to shield Winnie from the blow he knew would come. The RX-10 pitched forward, hurled its tail in the air, and then flopped over. Jimmie acted as a buffer for Winnie. The uneven ground saved both from being killed.

But Jimmie was stunned. The world went black for him.

Things were jumbled when his mind began registering again. There were the cries of a woman and children, and the shouts of a man. Crackling sounds. A wave of heat. And somebody was tugging at him, calling to him from a distance, it seemed, in a strangely muffled voice. It was Winnie, mouselike

little Winnie, trying to drag him from the burning plane.

"Jimmie! Jimmie!" she was crying. "Oh, help me get him away from here!"

The farmer and his wife came running, and stronger arms than Winnie's helped carry him to a safe place.

He lay with his head in Winnie's lap, trying to convince himself this was no dream. Something touched his lips and lingered for a moment. Something very warm and very sweet. It brought back day-old memories. He opened his eyes slowly.

"I thought—you'd just as soon kiss—one of the fish at the Park Aquarium?"

"That was nothing even remotely resembling a kiss." Winnie, too, was recalling things. "But here's one you'll not have to wait to read about!" And bashful Winnie forgot about her timidity as she pressed her lips hungrily upon her lover's.

"Gee!" sighed Jimmie æons later. "It's funny about you and me, isn't it?"

The farmer and his family, who had been staring, began talking:

"Say! You're young Jaynes, ain't you? And the lady is Winnie Lane! Say, we know you from seeing your pictures in the paper! We've taken the *Herald-Star* a long time, Miss Lane, and we always enjoy your stories."

Winnie was a reporter again. "Have you a telephone? You have? That's grand! Madam, would you please get the *Herald-Star* on the wire and tell them there has been an accident, but no one is hurt—"

"Sure, young lady." And the obliging family made off across the fields.

"Darling," came from the lips so near her ear, "they'll make a big story of it for the front page—do you mind?"

The future bride of Jimmy Jaynes shook her head. A lovely flush was mantling her cheeks, and suddenly she could not speak. Jimmy's arms rose and drew her face down to him.

"Lovely little sweetheart," he whispered against her soft lips, "I'm *glad* Winnie Lane kissed Jimmy Jaynes that first day—but after this the flying kid will do all the kissing necessary!"

And right then his duties began.

The Vision

WHEN blazed the sun and made the whole world bright,
I walked in darkness, blind, alone;
Mine eyes were closed to the all-blinding light
That on the others shone.

But when the shadows fell and you were near,
Though darkness all the world held fast,
My long-closed eyes were opened then, my dear,
And sight was mine at last!

Clifford Trembly

Two-Time Sweetheart

"I know you love me too much to do any two-timing," he told her. But then he went away and—

By ROBERTA LIVINGSTON

AFTER all it is difficult to get to sleep when it is June, and when one is nineteen and in love; so Doris Walling didn't even try. It was much nicer thinking of Johnny.

Doris remembered how awfully long ago she had met him—away back in the days when she had long curls, which he enjoyed pulling so enthusiastically. That was what made her realize that Johnny liked her. He didn't bother pulling other girls' hair—didn't pay any attention to them, in fact, though they all had long hair. True, Doris recalled smilingly, it wasn't curly like hers, but it was just a good length to entice little boys like Johnny Peters.

Without a word Johnny crushed her to him and kissed her—only the stars and the moon knew for how long

All the incidents that concerned and included herself and Johnny during grade and high school flashed before her in a miniature parade. The parade halted momentarily to allow Doris to review the incident — no, not an incident, but one of the biggest moments in her life —when Johnny kissed her for the first time. A little sigh of ecstasy escaped her at the remembrance.

And now they were grown-ups. She had turned nineteen, and Johnny was voting for the first time in November. Yes, they were getting on in years.

Funny, too, how

Johnny had changed! He never pulled her hair any more. Surely that wasn't because she wore it short and crinkly now, in a mass of brown ringlets? No, that wasn't it; but he liked much better, it seemed, to let his fingers trickle gently through it and kiss the stray little wisps that escaped here and there from the main crop.

Doris rested her head deep in her pillow and sighed like a contented little girl. Oh, he was so dear to her, he meant so much, she could never live without him, never!

AN auto horn awakened her. The sun was streaming in through the window. Goodness! It was Sunday, and Johnny had come to take her out for a drive. She jumped from under the sheets and slipped into her dainty negligee.

"I'll be ready in a minute, Johnny," she called softly down from her window.

"All right, but make it a snappy minute, won't you?" the blond, wavy-haired young man answered, looking up at Doris framed in an oblong of sea-green curtains and white woodwork.

When Doris had disappeared to do her quick change act, Johnny smiled wisely to himself and settled back against the worn upholstery of his second-hand roadster to read the entire Sunday newspaper.

"It's your own fault, Johnny, that I'm late this morning," Doris said teasingly, as she made herself comfortable beside him.

He laid aside the fourth section—he had got that far—and looked at her in good-natured amazement.

"My—my fault? How come?"

"You kept me awake thinking about you all of last night."

He threw her what he hoped was a look of despair, but instead it was a glance of adoration. He was so deeply in love with her that his heart wouldn't permit him to be much of an actor.

It was a wonderful day. They stopped for lunch at some little strip of beach that touched on a lake, ate Johnny's man-sized sandwiches, and devoured pickles and cakes and all the things that make picnicking so delightful. They drove up along the silvery Hudson and returned in time to see the West Pointers' evening dress parade. On the way home they stopped at a cozy, inexpensive tea room; and finally, as dusk melted into night, they reached Greyoaks, the sleepy little village where they both lived.

Before parting they stopped at their "garden of Eden," as they called it—a quiet little strip of woods not more than a quarter of a mile from Doris's home.

"Come on, honey—wake up!" Johnny said, shaking her gently with one hand and slipping the other around her lovely shoulders. "I have something important to tell you."

"You must kiss the sleeping princess if you would have her awake, fair prince," replied Doris. She held up her perfect lips.

Johnny touched his lips to her warm, velvety ones and drew her close to him. She wound her soft young arms around his neck and returned his kiss. Then she snuggled against his shoulder comfortably, and they held hands while he kissed the brown, crinkly curls he loved so much.

"You have something to tell me, Johnny?" she asked, with her face against his coat lapel.

"Yes, I have, sweetheart, but I hate like the devil to break the news. It

means that I'm going to be lonely for a while—and so are you, I guess."

"What? Lonely? What is it, Johnny? What do you mean?"

"It's like this, Doris," he said, holding her a little closer to him and imprisoning her hand in his. "I have a good opportunity for promotion, rapid promotion, in our company—"

"Yes?"

"But, you see, dear, I'll—I'll have to go away."

"Y-yes?"

"To South America. The manager down there needs an assistant, and the boss offered me the job. They won't need me long—just until we get that special coffee concession we're fighting for. I might be gone for six months, possibly a year, but no more than that."

Doris didn't say anything, but just snuggled closer to the man whom she loved more than anything else in the world. It would be hard to let him go, she knew, but—

"I'm awfully glad, Johnny boy—and sad, too, of course," she said. "I'm glad that you're getting this chance, and sad that I must give you up for so long; but we'll be close to each other in thought, won't we, and we can write and—"

He bent down and kissed her gently, lovingly, on the cheek. Something a little wet met his lips.

"Why, Doris, you're not crying, are you, honey?"

Then they were in each other's arms, and he was very silent, while she was talking and laughing and crying all at once.

The stillness around them was broken only by the breeze stirring gently in the trees, by the chirping of the crickets, who tried their best to silence the gurgling of the near-by brook, and by the occasional far-away whistle of a train. The warm night air drugged them with its sweetness, and though they were sad they were happy—happy in their love for each other and in all that it meant to them.

"I love you, Doris, sweetheart!"

"I love you, Johnny, darling!"

"How much?"

"Very much."

"For always?"

"For always—and a day."

And if it wasn't for a distant clock sounding its announcement that it was very late, there is no knowing how long they might have sat there in Johnny's roadster, oblivious of everything but each other.

HER last glimpse of Johnny as the boat pulled out from the pier Doris would never forget—how he waved to her, then counted on his fingers up to six, then made the motion of gathering her in his arms again and showed her how he would slip a ring on her finger. Then he was carried out of sight.

The taxi ride back to the Grand Central seemed like a nightmare. Could it be possible that Johnny was no longer here? It didn't seem real, somehow.

Seated in the train for Greyoaks, Doris gazed out into the night rushing by, her thoughts lost to everything but the day when Johnny would return. The train slowed down and stopped, and several passengers came into the car. One of them sat down next to her. She hardly noticed that the train had halted. Then it was roaring through the night again.

"Were you at the theater?" a pleasant voice inquired.

"I?" Doris asked, turning her head. "Why, no, I—I wasn't at the theater."

The young man smiled gently.

"I thought perhaps you had been to some play I haven't seen," he said, "and you could tell me about it. You see, I have nearly an hour's ride ahead of me, and it would help pass the time. You don't think me terribly cheeky, do you?"

"No, I'm glad to have some one to talk to," she answered. "I have about an hour's ride, too. Suppose you tell me what you saw?"

"I should be very happy to do that," he said.

As the young man outlined the play, Doris closed her eyes and imagined that she and Johnny were playing the leading rôles.

"My, that was splendid!" she said, when he had finished. "I must see that some time. Do you know you let down the final curtain just in time? I get off at the next stop."

"Greyoaks? Well, this is a coincidence—and fate *has* been kind to me! I'm living with friends at Lynwood, just above Greyoaks, this summer. My name is Tom Langford."

Doris extended her tiny hand with a smile of welcome.

"I'm glad to know you, Mr. Langford. Shall I act as the welcoming committee? But I must hurry—here's my station."

It would have been ungracious for Doris to refuse Tom Langford's polite offer to see her home; yet all the time she was at his side she was wishing that she was with Johnny Peters.

"Little girls like you shouldn't be out alone so late at night," Langford remarked gently.

Doris nodded and explained in a few words where she had been. He smiled down at her.

"Perhaps I can fill the void to some little extent, Miss Walling, until your *fiancé* comes back?" he said.

She smiled confusedly and let his suggestion pass without an answer. She didn't want to go out with any one else. She was willing to be a little lonely until Johnny's return.

The rest of the way they walked in silence, Doris thinking of Johnny, and Thomas thinking of Doris.

"Good night," he said at her doorstep. "I'm going to phone you soon."

She would have liked it better, she thought, if he had said:

"May I phone you soon?"

DORIS was writing her first letter to Johnny when the telephone rang, and the intrusion seemed almost a sacrilege. It was Tom Langford. He wanted her to see the show he had told her about.

"I'm sure Mr. Peters wouldn't mind," he said. "He certainly can't expect you to sit home and twiddle your thumbs all the time he's away. He isn't that kind of a guy, is he?"

Doris felt inclined to inform him that Johnny was no "guy," but she realized that what Tom had said was true.

"Don't stick home, sweet, just because I'm away," her lover had told her. "Keep on the go, have a good time, and the few months till my return will pass quicker. I don't have to tell you to be a good girl." Then he had looked at her in his own endearing way. "I know you love me too much to do any two-timing or anything like that.

"And besides, dear, this will be a good test for us, won't it? If I'm not really the man for you, you'll realize it while I'm gone. If there's some one in this world for whom you are going to care more than for me, I'd rather

have you find him now than after we are married. We're crazy about each other, Doris, and I'm sure we always shall be, but my going away will prove just how strong our love is—if it's the kind that lasts."

And then Johnny had swept her into his arms and kissed her hair, her eyes, her nose, her lips; and she had said that there could never, never be any one but him, and he had assured her that she was the only girl for him—forever.

"No, Mr. Langford, I'm sorry I can't go to-night"—Doris thought of the letter that she had just begun—"but perhaps some other time. Friday evening? Yes, I think that will be all right. Good-by, and thank you for the invitation."

She dismissed Tom Langford and the telephone call from her mind, and sat down to finish her letter to Johnny.

FRIDAY night came, and Doris, dressed in a pretty blue tulle dress, answered Tom's ring.

"My, but you look sweet, Doris!" he said as he stepped forward, taking her hand in both of his, his eyes spelling their appreciation of her beauty.

He was a good-looking young fellow, too, and appeared to advantage in his perfectly fitted evening clothes; but Doris didn't like him to use her first name. It sounded too familiar. He mustn't think he had that right.

"Thank you," she said simply. "I'd like you to meet my people."

They left after the conventional introductions, some rather vague explanations of his visit, and numerous instructions to Tom to be sure and take good care of Doris.

The play in reality was quite as good as it had sounded. They supped and danced afterward, and Doris couldn't help admiring the way Tom Langford danced—just like a professional. True, he did hold her rather close to him at times, but this, she decided, was because he could lead her better that way. They left early and caught the last train home, and Doris admitted that she had had a wonderful time.

The wail of a siren somewhere out on the river reminded her of Johnny. She missed him terribly—even a letter would help to cheer her up.

"Why so silent?" Tom asked, as they walked toward her home.

"Oh, just thinking."

"Of Johnny?"

"Yes."

Tom bit his lip.

"Can't you forget him, Doris? Don't you see that I'm trying to make you forget him?" She started at this—not only at what he said, but at the passion in his voice. "I'm in love with you, Doris! I can't help it. I want you more than I've ever wanted anything. I had to tell you, I had to. I want to marry you, Doris."

She halted abruptly and looked up at him, confusion written on her face. She didn't know what to say, what to do.

"Why—why, Mr. Langford!" she stammered.

He looked right down into her eyes, and he must have misinterpreted what he read there. Before Doris could evade him he bent down and kissed her full on the mouth, hungrily, ardently.

Finally he freed her. She was crying.

"I'm sorry," he said chokily. "I must have forgotten myself. Please forgive me, won't you?"

She was too much hurt, too much surprised, to hear what he was saying. She just moved along dumbly beside him until they reached home.

She cried herself to sleep that night, vowing never to go out with Tom Langford again.

THE next morning, when she came down to breakfast, a letter from Johnny was awaiting her. "Save your dessert for the last," her mother teased, as Doris feverishly tore open the letter she so desired.

Doris would never forget how he waved to her — then made the motion of gathering her in his arms

Johnny told her of his voyage, of his arrival, of getting to work; and every other line told her how much he missed her, how he would willingly give his right arm for just one of her kisses, and how he was looking forward to the time when he could hold her in his arms again.

And last night another man had held her in his arms! Doris hated Tom Langford for doing what he had done. She felt that she could never forgive him.

The telephone rang. It was Langford. He proffered repeated apologies, and promised that if she would continue going out with him he would never, never force his attentions on her again. At last, perhaps because Johnny's letter had made the world seem rosy again, and her heart sing with joy, Doris relented.

And so the months flew by. Every week Doris received a big fat letter from Johnny, and every week she sent him a big fat letter. She continued going out with Tom, who made no further attempt to take liberties. At times,

however, she would surprise him looking at her lovingly, devouringly, and she would feel afraid. She had never forgotten how he had kissed her that night.

Then one week Doris received no letter. That seemed strange, for it was the first time in four months that Johnny had missed writing. Perhaps he was ill. No, that couldn't be, must not be. Hadn't she prayed that he might be kept in good health? Perhaps he had had to leave his post suddenly for some remote place. Yes, that was it. She laughed away her worries.

But her worries grew into doubt, and doubt into fear when she heard nothing of him the following week. Even if he had gone far into the interior, wouldn't he have left a letter to be sent her?

Perhaps he was on the way home! She dismissed that thought immediately; he would certainly have informed her. All the time a terrible little fear kept tugging at her heart—a fear which she tried again and again to kill, but couldn't.

Then, like a bolt of lightning shot from a clear blue sky, the blow descended upon her, crushed her, trampled her, humiliated her, and all but killed her. Little Bobbie Simpkins, the station agent's nephew, handed her a blue and white envelope. She ripped it open in a second and stood swaying like a tulip in the wind, with the pallor of death in her face.

Somehow she managed to find her way up to her room, the cablegram gripped tightly in her fist. Her mother found her sobbing heartbrokenly into her pillow.

"What is it, dear? What is the matter? What has happened to you? Tell your mother; she'll understand, dear. Stop crying, Doris, and tell me what's wrong. Please do!"

Dumbly Doris held the cable out to her. It read:

Doris, I'm married. Please forgive me if you can, and forget—

JOHNNY.

Now Doris knew the meaning of love and life and disappointment. So Johnny hadn't been able to stand the test! He had really never loved her—not as she loved him.

How cruel it all was, how terrible! If only he had never gone to South America, if only she had insisted upon his staying in Greyoaks with her, then he would never have met this other girl whom he had married.

Finally the sand man took pity on Doris and closed her tear-stained eyes; but her sleep was troubled, and picture after picture flashed through her tired mind. First she saw Johnny, her Johnny, marching down the aisle—with another girl; then another scene in which she herself was stepping slowly to the altar—with Tom Langford.

THE next morning she did her best to forget everything, but it was useless. As she had told Johnny before he left, she could never love any one but him. All that day she worked listlessly at the office, her heart grieving and her lips yearning for the man who had forsaken her.

It took Doris about a month to realize that Johnny would never come back to her; but gradually she accepted, more or less philosophically, the barb that fate had driven so ruthlessly into her heart.

Tom helped her to forget. For a time she didn't see him much, for she didn't feel equal to it; but to-night they were going out together "on a whoo-

pee party to forget everything." That was how Tom had put it. Well, why not? It was all over now. And after all he loved her.

First they had dinner, then they attended a snappy, wise-cracking musical comedy. Supper they took in a riotous night club, where the dancing was only a little less promiscuous than the petting. Couples clung to each other and kissed on the dance floor; liquor passed freely at every table; hardly any one was sober.

For the first time in her life Doris was enjoying the shameless revelry. She gleefully accepted the amber liquid that Tom poured into her ginger ale from a very shiny flask. She had two drinks, and things looked a little misty; then a third, and the club, the dancers, and Tom became an obscure blur; but she felt happy.

They were dancing. She could feel Tom's hot breath fanning her cheek. He was whispering something in her ear—something about loving her. She was aware that he was holding her very tight. She didn't seem to mind; it was all in fun. Then the dancing stopped, and she told Tom she wanted to go home.

The dance floor seemed a little shaky as she crossed it. She giggled and clung to her escort's arm for support. It steadied her. Dimly she knew that they were descending what seemed like a million stairs. She felt the cold air strike her face.

She must have dozed, because she opened her eyes and found her head resting on Tom's shoulder, while his arm was around her, holding her close to him. They were riding in a taxi. She looked up and smiled shamefacedly.

"Where are we, Tom? Have I been asleep ever since we left?"

Somehow it seemed all right to use his first name.

"We're pretty near home, dear," he answered. "You slept almost all the way. How do you feel?"

"Pretty well, thanks. So that's the way it feels to get—oh, what do they call it?—tight! That's the word, isn't it?"

"Yes," he answered, "that's the word." He smiled as he realized that this was the first girl he had ever taken out who didn't know all about "getting tight." "I'm glad you feel well," he added. "Oh, Doris—"

He drew her still closer.

"Yes?"

"Doris, will you marry me? You know how much I love you. Say yes! Forget all about Johnny, just as he forgot about you. Give me the chance to help make you forget. Surely he could never have loved you as I do!"

Yes, Johnny had forgotten her—had forgotten her quickly enough when they were not together. Tom really loved her, and perhaps she would learn to love him as she had once loved Johnny. Perhaps he could help her to forget all about Johnny, and could make her peacefully, serenely happy again, as happy as she had been once—it seemed ages ago now.

"Yes, Tom," she said with a curious lack of emotion. "Yes, I will marry you."

And she let him have her lips—lips that she had never given before to any one but Johnny.

During the following days, however, her heart rebelled, and it was only by insistent fighting that she succeeded in keeping herself from returning to Tom the glittering solitaire that he had placed on her finger.

At the most ridiculous times—when she was looking over a menu, when

she was transcribing her notes, when she was reading the newspaper—Johnny kept disturbing her peace of mind. Sometimes he would remind her that he had never taken her to a speak-easy and given her too much to drink; that he never even carried a flask. At other times he would ask her if she wasn't doing Tom Langford, as well as herself, a grave injustice by marrying him. There were times, too, when he reminded her that Tom never played with her crinkly brown hair as he had done so often; that Tom never made delicious little shivers run through her; that Tom never kissed her gently and reverently, as Johnny used to.

But then she would vision Johnny holding that other girl, his wife, in his strong arms, toying with her hair, making her shiver deliciously, and kissing her. Then Doris would drive him from her thoughts and resolve more firmly than ever that she *would* go through with her marriage — that Tom *would* teach her to forget.

Doris had decided that the ceremony should be performed in her home town, in the church she had attended ever since she was a child, and by the same clergyman who had baptized her nineteen long years ago. All Tom's persistent entreaties that they should be married immediately she brushed aside gently but firmly.

"Your work can wait another few weeks for you," she said.

Tom could do nothing but be content, and they agreed that Thanksgiving would make an ideal wedding day. Coincidently she remembered that Thanksgiving would be exactly two months after the day when she had received Johnny's cruel message. Was fate trying to be ironic?

It was lots of fun shopping, rushing around, dashing here and there, taking care of thousands of things. Doris found herself growing less remorseful, and looking forward to her wedding with happy expectation; but somehow she didn't reach the glorious height of bliss that she knew most brides attained. Perhaps if it were Johnny that she was marrying—

She killed the thought and drove it from her mind. Nevertheless her heart still kept singing with each little beat, so loud that she was afraid those around her might hear and understand it, that she would never stop loving Johnny—never.

IT was the eve of Thanksgiving—a beautiful night. Innumerable stars glittered in the sky, as if glad of the opportunity to join in helping merrymakers to find their way here and there, wherever they might be going. Every one was happy—every one but Doris.

To-morrow she was to be married—married to a man whom she loved less than she loved another man. Such was life! It was all so terrible—this pretending that she was happy, this making believe that she had forgotten Johnny, this constant effort to convince herself that Tom Langford would, in time, teach her to forget Johnny. If only she could look into the future and see what was really in store for her!

In nineteen years Doris had never had cause to be unhappy at Thanksgiving. Why couldn't she forget all those beautiful, wonderful Thanksgivings of previous years, when she and Johnny had dressed up as ragamuffins and gone masquerading with the rest of the gang?

Oh, it was cruel that every one else

should be so gay and she so sad—and why? Just because she had received a cablegram from the man she once loved — the past tense grated against her heart—saying that he was married, and that she should forgive and forget him. As if that were possible! She could neither forgive him nor forget him.

Doris walked across her little room and looked out into the night. The twinkling stars meant nothing to her. Off in the distance she could dimly see the tops of the trees that had shaded their trysting place. That tiny forest had heard their secrets, laughed with them, sighed with them, cried with them.

There was the place to bury the love she carried in her heart. Perhaps the trees would sigh, or the brook would whisper some helpful suggestion.

She took from her little secrétaire the letters Johnny had written — and the fatal cablegram.

She walked slowly, and wondered if she was being dramatically foolish. No, that wasn't it. She wasn't striving for effect. No one knew what she was doing. She wasn't acting. An actor needs an audience and a theater, and she had neither.

Dark as the shadows of the trees made the familiar path that she had walked so many times, hand in hand with Johnny, she was not afraid. It was a straight, narrow path, soft under foot with the dead leaves of which nature had formed a carpet. It made her think of the morrow and Tom Langford, and of the path she would be walking with him—"the aisle," they called it in a church.

She pictured everything as it would be—the crowded church, the bells ringing out their glad tidings, the stirring strain of the wedding march, her father coming to lend his arm, the slow walk down the softly carpeted aisle, soft tears staining her pretty face, her heart singing "Johnny, I love you," over and over again in time with the organ's rhythm, her eyes meeting Tom's, and finally the clergyman opening his prayer book—

Doris wiped her eyes. To-morrow she would be married. This was her last rendezvous, if it could be called a rendezvous when there was no Johnny to share it with her, no Johnny to take her in his arms, to kiss her, to whisper words of love into her ear.

She sighed heavily, bent down, and began digging a hole, a grave, for his letters—and for his love. When she had finished, when the soil covered everything, then he would be dismissed from her heart, then all thought of him would be banished from her mind forever. It would be just as if there had never been a Johnny Peters; and yet something inside her cried out that that could never be — that she never would, never could stop loving him.

With every weak little thrust of the stick into the soft soil Doris felt as if it were a thrust into her own heart, slowly deadening it, killing it, so that it could never more have room for the man she had once loved.

Suddenly she stopped, petrified with fright. The crack of a branch, as if trodden underfoot, rang through the night. She sat very still, very much afraid, but calm. Nothing happened; everything was quiet.

"A squirrel," she decided, and set to work again. She dug for about two minutes, and then became uneasy. Somehow she felt eyes upon her back. There was something there—she knew it, felt it. She was almost afraid to turn around.

"Doris!" a voice said.

It chilled her to the marrow, but she felt calm. She did not answer.

"Doris!"

A little louder this time. Surely her ears were playing tricks! It must be, she thought, that the trees or the brook had actually decided to speak to her. It was true, then, that Indians spoke to animals and trees, that these children of nature spoke to them, and that they both understood.

"Doris!" the voice called, again a little louder.

She remained as still as a statue, her back to the voice. It sounded familiar, but no—it could not be. It was a dream. Her mind was tormenting her. Perhaps she was ill, perhaps the agony within her had unbalanced her. She turned around, slowly, fearfully.

"Johnny!" she shrieked.

Then everything went blacker than the blackness of the forest.

Doris opened her eyes. She reached up and touched his face. Then she felt of the blond, wavy hair.

"It is you? You are real? You have come back? When, and why? Oh, I can't believe it—it's all so impossible!"

"Hush, Doris, you're all right; but I must have frightened you awfully."

She struggled out of his arms.

"Oh, why did you come back? Why didn't you stay where you were—why have you come back to torture me? Where is your wife, Johnny? Why didn't you stay with her? Where is she?"

He stopped her angrily, roughly.

"I've heard enough about this wife business, Doris. 'Where's your wife?' said Mr. Tucker at the station, as I got off the train. 'Where's your wife?' inquired your mother and father, and now you ask me the same thing. What kind of a stall is that, Doris? I thought you always played square; I never thought you'd stoop to a mean lie as an excuse. What of it if you did fall for this fellow? Didn't I tell you before I left that I'd wish to have you meet the man you want before we were married, rather than after? Well, you met him, didn't you? Why didn't you just write me and say so? Why start this rotten lie to excuse yourself? Now I know why you quit writing."

He stopped suddenly, tears welling up in his eyes. Doris was dumfounded; she couldn't have spoken if she wanted to.

"I was called suddenly into the interior," continued Johnny, his voice low and fierce. "I couldn't write you for two weeks. I thought you'd understand. Then, when I didn't hear from you—when there was no letter waiting for me when I got back—I was afraid that perhaps you had been ill and couldn't write; but finally, as the weeks slipped by and I received no word from you, I realized that things had gone wrong. I came home, my heart and mind fighting each other; and what do I find? You about to marry another fellow!"

She tried to stop him, but he went right on, as if only by talking could he control himself.

"But nothing can change me. I said I'd love you forever, and I meant it.

He took a step toward her. She could not see his eyes, because of the darkness, but she could feel their pleading gaze burning into her soul.

"Answer me just one thing, honey, won't you?" he said. "Why did you do it? What made you change your mind?"

His hands gripped her two slender arms so hard that they hurt, but to Doris the pain felt like heaven.

"Johnny dear, I do love you. Can't you tell that? Come closer. Look in my eyes—what do you see there? Love—love for you, Johnny, that's what you see in them; only—oh, never mind, just kiss me, Johnny, kiss me!"

WITHOUT a word Johnny crushed her to him and kissed her—only the trees and the stars and the moon know for how long. He held her as tightly to him as a little girl hugs a lost doll, and yet his caresses were as gentle as a mother's.

"Don't cry, Doris girl! Tell Johnny all about it. Please stop, honey! Don't cry like that! You'll break your heart—and mine, too."

But Doris had been waiting for six long months to lay her head against his shoulder, to feel his strong arms around her, to taste his kisses on her lips, to have him fondle her curly, crinkly hair. He was doing all these things now, while she sobbed and happily thought to herself:

"Johnny has come back to me. He isn't married. He never was married. He loves me. He'll love me forever!"

Finally she quieted her sobbing, calmed the emotions running rampant within her, smiled up at him, and said:

"Oh, honey, I love you! I don't know what I ever would have done without you. Oh, I'm glad you've come back!"

"But, Doris, you're being married to-morrow." It was a question rather than a statement.

"Of course not, silly," she replied, smiling through her tears.

She reached into her pocket for her compact. Instead, her hand touched the fatal cablegram, which she still carried there. It startled her. She looked at her wrist watch. It was just nine o'clock, she could see.

"Now let's be getting out of these awful woods," she said, in a changed tone.

"Awful?" he asked.

They both laughed, she brushed away his tears, and he brushed away hers. Hand in hand they walked back together toward Doris's home.

"Where are you stopping, Johnny?" she inquired presently.

"At the hotel," he answered.

"All right—I'll tell you what. Meet me at the railroad station in time to catch the train that leaves at two minutes past twelve. Yes?"

"As if you need ask! But, sweetheart, what about your bridegroom?"

Doris's eyes narrowed.

"I don't think he's worth worrying about," she replied. "I mean the other one," she added smilingly.

Though Johnny Peters thought to himself that this didn't sound a bit like Doris Walling, her answer satisfied him, even if it didn't fully explain things. He kissed her again ecstatically, mumbled something about two minutes past twelve, and then the night swallowed him up.

WHEN Doris reached home the first question her parents asked her was:

"Did you see Johnny Peters?"

She didn't answer them, but marched straight up to Tom Langford, who had been waiting for her.

"Well, Mr. Thomas Langford," she said sharply, "I've had that cablegram traced."

The ruse worked. Tom turned pale and stammered:

"What—what are you t-talking about?" Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead, and his hands twitched nervously. "What cablegram?"

"You know what cablegram—the one that Johnny was supposed to have sent me." Doris noted the guilty look in his eyes, try as he might to hide it. "How could you ever do such a despicable thing? Oh, you're horrid, horrid! I don't ever want to see you again!"

Her lips hissed the words, her eyes flashed fire.

Langford looked at Doris like a broken, beaten dog.

"Yes, you're right—it was a rotten trick. My love for you is my only excuse. I had a friend of mine send that message and sign Johnny's name to it. I got a lucky break—at least, I thought it was a lucky break—when you received no letters from him for two weeks. It looked like a good time to work the cablegram trick. There were letters from him later on, but I had them intercepted. I can't possibly expect you to forgive me."

He walked to the door dejectedly, hat in hand.

"Good-by," he said, and then he was gone.

Five minutes after midnight a pretty young girl and a sun-tanned young man sat in the last seat in the last car of the last train from Greyoaks. They were bound for they knew not where —nor did they care much.

For a long while neither spoke. They seemed content to sit with their shoulders touching and their hands clasped. Finally the young man said:

"Doris, what gave all you people the idea that I was married, anyhow?"

"This did, Johnny," Doris replied, and handed him the forged cablegram.

He stuttered, he fumed, he choked.

"But—but, honey, what the devil? I never—"

"No, I know you never sent it, Johnny; but I didn't know that until you came home and told me so. Heavens, it's a good thing you came in time! By the way, sweetheart, how come you trailed me to the woods?"

"I didn't trail you, Doris. When I learned that you were going to be married to-morrow—no, to-day—I decided to bury my love for you in the place that knew so much about it. I hoped that perhaps the woods would tell me what to do—show me a way to forget."

Doris threw him a quizzical look.

"Funny, isn't it?"

"Don't see anything funny about that, you little minx," he told her.

"No-o, of course not," she said, smiling to herself. "*You* wouldn't;" and she squeezed his hand wisely.

Resignedly he shrugged his shoulders.

"But tell me, darling, whatever happened to the chap you were to marry?"

Doris snuggled against Johnny comfortably, kissed his nose, and whispered:

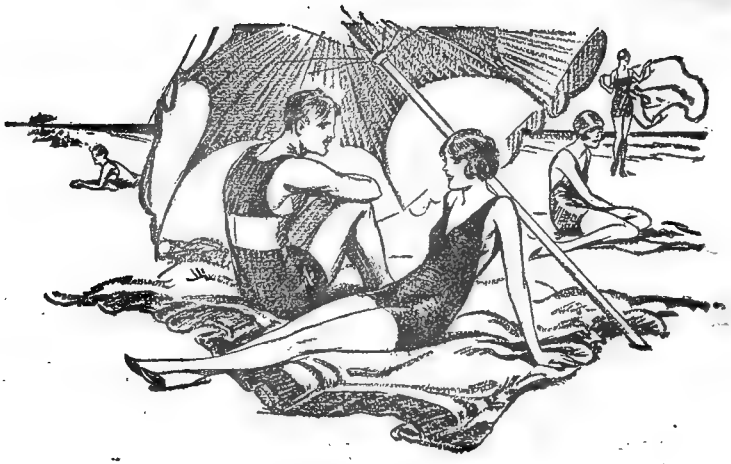
"Why, he's right here beside me, you stupid old thing! And if he doesn't hurry and find a clergyman, I'll disown him for life!"

Don't Miss

Saturday Night and No Date

By DOROTHY DAYTON

In next issue of ALL-STORY on the stands October 16



Swiftly the afternoon hours flew by, bringing them closer to love with every whispered confidence

Little Love Pirate

He belonged to another girl, and yet they were meant for each other

By ETHEL LeCOMPTE

GIRLS in "confession" magazines and even girls in real life—strange, unprincipled creatures they must be—fell in love with their engaged or married employers and caused all sorts of trouble. But never in the world could this happen to her, Ottilie Wylie told Ottilie Wylie severely each time she found her thoughts dwelling on Thané McBrayer.

Besides, there was Martin.

When Ottilie was graduated from business school, Martin, now earning good money as a riveter, had asked her to marry him. She promised to become his wife in two years. Nothing he could do or say would make her shorten the time.

The school secured a job for her in the office of Thane McBrayer, a clev-

er young architect. At the end of a year and a half he made her his private secretary. Ottilie was too excited to speak coherently when she told Martin about it, but Martin could and did speak quite plainly. He did not want her to spend her days in any man's private office. Ever since their engagement he had pleaded, on the average of once a week, that she quit and marry him! Now he demanded it. This led to a real quarrel, and ended in a break which lasted several days.

She should have suffered, but—

To her surprise, Ottilie was not in the least desolated. She was intensely interested in her new work, proud that she had been chosen for the position and was able to earn fifty dollars a week. She borrowed books on architecture from the office, and spent many evenings reading them. When she wanted to go to the theater or the talkies, she had the money to pay for the tickets, and the girl friends to go with. Not that she didn't miss Martin. She did, but she enjoyed her freedom and independence. Martin was an exacting and bossy lover.

From the beginning Thane McBrayer had been a glamorous figure in the eyes of romantic nineteen. He was handsome, charming, and considerate, but it was his ability and success in his work that appealed to Ottilie at first. Love for him was not born until long after.

He, too, was engaged. When Ottilie saw his *fiancée,* Irene Trask, she thought her the most beautiful girl she had ever seen. She discredited the gossip of Marge, the switchboard operator, who declared that Irene Trask was marrying Thane McBrayer for his money. No one as exquisite as the blond, blue-eyed Irene could be mercenary.

But one day Ottilie found out that Marge was right.

THANE McBRAYER burst in upon her one forenoon with the news that his plans for the White Circle Steamship building had been accepted.

"I've declared a holiday," the architect continued. "The rest of the staff are leaving now, so you'd best—" He stopped short and strode over to her desk. His slender, vital-looking hand patted her quivering shoulder. "Glad the old man made good? But, you funny little somebody, you mustn't weep over it, y'know. Do you realize how much you've helped me? I've never had so willing and efficient a secretary, and how you've kept all the pests away from me besides doing the work of two!"

The eyes Ottilie raised to his smiling ones were misty, but her smile was gallant. "I've loved doing it," she told him simply. "I've been happy here, and I can't tell you how glad I am about the White Circle plans."

Thane mused on her a moment. "Gad, how sweet you are, little nut-brown maid," he said. Then: "Why the past tense? Won't you go on loving it, Miss Helper-in-chief?"

Ottilie's dark lashes swept her cheek. Silently she pointed to the diamond on the third finger of her left hand.

"Great Scott!" exploded Thane. "You're not going to be married soon, are you, Miss Wylie?"

Ottilie raised surprised eyes to his scowling face.

"Next month," she told him. "You knew I was engaged—"

"But you can't! How'm I to get on without you?"

"As you did before I came," she answered. Then, seeing his dark look,

added: "I'll stay until I break in Miss Staley—"

"Don't want Miss Staley," he cut in, peevish as a small boy offered a rocking horse when he has his heart set on a real pony.

"Well, whomever you pick, then."

"Want none of 'em. Went thru enough before you came to ease my burdens and brighten my days." It was the small boy flattering now, and wheedling: "Say you will stay another year—six months even."

"Two years ago I promised Martin to marry him this June, and I've never broken a promise yet, Mr. McBrayer," Ottilie told him quietly.

"You can ask him to extend the time," Thane pointed out.

Ottilie shook her head. "He's been cross enough about waiting two years. We've had one break. Another would be the end."

"You—would be sorry if it were—the end?" Thane asked softly.

"Of course," Ottilie answered stiffly.

"You love him as much as that?" he probed.

"We've been sweethearts since we were children."

"You're a child now, far too young to marry or to know what love is. Isn't it, this love, about the same as you have for your brother?"

"I never had a brother," Ottilie answered quickly. Then, as this new idea he had brought her sank in, she raised startled eyes to his anxious face. "I wonder if it is," she whispered, appalled.

"Of course it is," he answered, selfish in his desire to keep her. "You mustn't think of marrying any one you don't love as a wife should love her husband. When you find that one, you'll know. There'll be not the slightest doubt in your mind. Even if that love dies," he went on, more to himself than to her, "you'll have known the ecstasy of it for a while, and that 'll light the dark that comes later."

Ottilie heard him with growing amazement, her great, dark eyes on his emotion-ravaged face.

"Love doesn't always die," she said.

Thane shrugged and smiled bitterly. "No," he agreed. "Sometimes one of two lovers keeps it alive to torture the other." He flung away from her and strode to the window.

The tap-a-tap of Ottilie's typewriter caused him to glance around.

"No more work to-day, Miss Wylie," he ordered. "Run along, now. And think over what I've said." He crossed to his desk and sat down.

"I've some work that I'd like to finish," Ottilie answered.

FOR nearly an hour the only sound in the room was the rapid tapping of typewriter keys and the rustling of pages. Suddenly from the outer office came a man's voice:

"Any one around? Lady to see Mr. McBrayer."

Ottilie hurried to the door, ready to defend her harried boss from any female taking subscriptions, selling something, or merely "calling." Waiting with the elevator operator was Thane McBrayer's *fiancée*. Without a word she pushed by Ottilie and hurried into the private office.

Ottilie, lingering uncertainly in the drafting room, heard her ask sharply: "Where's everybody? Why are you alone with that girl?"

"Why, Irene, how nice to see you," Thane was greeting her through her questions. "Sit here and listen to my wonderful news—why I let the gang off early. Too hot to work, anyway."

"I've no time to listen to anything," Irene retorted impatiently. "I'm on my way to a bridge luncheon, and stopped in to ask you to give me my birthday present now. I simply must wear that bracelet and give the rest of the girls an eyeful!"

Thane laughed. It sounded forced to Ottilie, amazed and angry. Thane went on: "You're not going to any bridge to-day, dear. You and I are going to celebrate together. The White Circle Steamship Company have accepted your boy's plans for their ten-million-dollar building!"

"Well, that is nice, Thane. Now we can go to Europe for our honeymoon."

"I'm sorry, Irene, but that's out of the question. I can't possibly leave the country this year. These plans and—"

"We'll talk that over some other time and I'll convince you," cut in Irene. "I'm late for my engagement now. Get the bracelet out of the safe and let me go, like a good boy."

"But, surely you won't go to the bridge when I want you to come out with me for the rest of the day."

"Don't be absurd, Thane. One can't break a bridge engagement. Give me the bracelet and stop arguing."

"Irene, you know how I feel about birthdays. I want to give it to you next Sunday, your birthday, and not before. There's no sentiment in giving it to you to-day."

"Oh, sentiment!" scoffed Irene. "You're just trying to punish me for not going out with you this afternoon."

"You really think I'd be that mean, dear?"

There was a silence, broken by Irene:

"Oh, Thane, you are a dear. It's so much more gorgeous than I expected. Wait until the girls see this; they'll turn green. Well, thanks, and so long."

"You're really going?" Thane's voice was husky.

"Why, of course. If you're lonesome take that office wife of yours when you go skylarking."

Ottilie felt the blood rush to her face. She hurried down to the rest room and dropped into one of the wicker chairs. If only she had her hand bag or even the key to her locker she need not see Thane again. Something strange and disquieting was stirring within her. Something that would make it difficult for her to face Thane just now. Unbidden, pictures of herself sitting beside him in his car, sitting opposite him in a restaurant having tea, dancing with him, came to her and she did not banish them.

Presently the newborn feeling became less upsetting. Became, in fact, pleasurable, blissful.

She glanced at her watch. Surely he would be gone now. She powdered her straight little nose and then regarded herself anxiously. Her dark, rich coloring needed no artificial aid. She ran the comb through her heavy brown hair.

"Nut-brown maid," she repeated softly. "And I've always hated you for being that way instead of pink and gold! I shan't any more. Besides, I've just learned that the pink and gold ones are not always princesses." With a sigh she turned away from the mirror.

SHE found Thane McBrayer still seated at his desk. For once he was idle. At the sound of her footsteps he looked up. His face was grim; his eyes were those of a man desolated.

"I thought you had gone," he said dully.

"No." Ottilie crossed to his side, hating the woman who had drained the light of exultation from his eyes, taken the joyous ring from his voice. "Have you finished for the day?" she asked.

Thane looked down at the papers on the desk. "I suppose I have," he answered vaguely.

Then it was that she made her decision. She swallowed hard and gripped the edge of the desk.

"Then," Ottilie said, "we can start."

"Start?" His eyes and voice were puzzled.

Ottilie gripped the desk harder. "Celebrating," she explained.

He still looked puzzled. "You and I together?"

Panic seized her, but Ottilie stuck to her colors. "Yes," she answered, smiling bravely. "It—it's a lovely day, isn't it?"

He regarded her through narrowed lids. "Lovelier than I thought," he answered thoughtfully. "Where shall we go?"

"Wherever you say." Why, she asked herself, had she started this?

"No, this is your party, little life-saver. I'm at your command."

Ottilie laughed shakily. "You say, please," she begged. "I don't know what you like to do or where you like to go."

"Take it for granted that I like to do the things you like to do, go the places you like to go, and carry on along those lines."

Ottilie thought of the new and decidedly extravagant ensemble of silk whose brilliant blue was subdued to smartness by adjacent strips of beige and dull rose which she had purchased for her "going away" costume. Hat, shoes, bag, everything to match were in her wardrobe. There was also a sun-back bathing suit upon which Martin had frowned.

"Let's," suggested Ottilie, "go bathing at Long Beach and have dinner there and come home by moonlight."

"Great! Can do, fair lady. That is, I can provide the car to waft us to pleasure land, and the dinner, but not so sure about the moon. Is it essential?" He was plainly interested now, Ottilie felt.

"Oh, we must have a moon. You go see the weather man while I go home and dress." She commanded airily.

"My dear child, the weather man—oh, well, I see that there must be a moon. As for dressing, you look all right as is. Why waste time?"

"Of course I look all right," agreed Ottilie modestly. "All right for the office. But when I celebrate, I don celebrating togs. You must, too. For five or seven hours we'll play make-believe, and then—"

"And then?" he prompted as she did not go on.

"We'll return to our usual status and forget the celebrating that we've done."

"That's the idea!" He thrust out his hand and Ottilie let hers rest in its vital clasp a one tiny second. "You are a wonder." There was a hint of relief in his voice that made Ottilie ask:

"You really want to go?"

"You know I do!" He swept the papers from the top of his desk into a drawer. "Whoopee for two from 2 P.M. until 2 A.M. is the program—if you'll make me a promise."

"Whatever can you want me to promise?" demanded Ottilie.

"That you'll make that lucky *fiancé*

of yours wait at least six months. I need you more than he does."

"He doesn't think so, but—I promise." Then, with a pert smile: "The 2 A.M. stuff is out. My middle name is Cinderella."

"Right-o, Miss Cinderella," he agreed readily. "I'll call for you."

She gave him her address in West Eleventh Street.

WHEN his low-slung roadster drew up before the old brownstone house where Ottilie occupied a tiny, two room bath kitchenette apartment, she was waiting on the steps. She thought that, in his "celebrating togs"—gray homespun suit and rakish panama—he looked as his own younger brother would look.

Thane, standing at the foot of the steps, regarded her with undisguised admiration.

"From the tip of her shoes to the top of her hat she is—perfect," was what he said.

"He looks decidedly handsome and festive himself," she came back.

"Well, come on, let's give the public a treat."

"Or those who know us a shock," she answered soberly as she suddenly remembered that adventuring for an engaged man and his secretary, who is herself engaged, is likely to do just that.

He shrugged, then hastened to remind her: "We have the permission of the one who has most cause to be shocked. I suppose that is why you suggested—this."

"Ah, now you know my secret. I confess that I snooped."

"Thank whatever gods there may be that you did!" he retorted fervently. He threw in his gears and the car glided away. "It was a feeling of pity," he pursued, "that led you to take your daring leap, eh?"

At the corner the red light halted them.

"Of course it was. But I was in a panic when I did it."

"And are you still?"

"Yes."

"Little fibber."

They sat and smiled into each other's eyes.

"Green light's on, captain," a husky voice near by confided.

Ottilie looked up into the grinning face of a taxi driver and flushed. But Thane grinned back and flung him a cool "thank you."

Traffic made conversation disjointed until they reached the Parkway. Then Ottilie felt too thrilled to want to talk. The steadily mounting speedometer was an intoxicant. Thane, too, was silent. His face wore an expression of joyous expectation that convinced Ottilie she had done the right thing in suggesting this adventure. For a few hours she would make him forget his *fiancée's* cruelty.

Once she looked up to find his dark, devouring eyes upon her. She turned away quickly, shaken out of her happy mood.

"Like it?" Thane asked softly.

"Love it," she assured him gayly.

"Like—me?"

"Very much."

Through the curtain of her lashes she saw, by his expression, that that was not the answer he wanted.

"Oh, I can smell the ocean!" she cried, seizing anything that would fill the uncomfortable gap.

"Smells good to me," Thane returned enthusiastically, his face clearing. "Can you swim?"

"I've won three cups," bragged Ottilie.

"You're a great girl!" he admired. "Great not only because of the things you do, but because of the things you —do not do."

"Meaning?" Ottilie's eyebrows went up.

"Why, do you know, you've never criticized my driving, never told me not to drive so fast, nor mentioned that a car was approaching, nor stepped on an imaginary brake. What a girl!"

Ottilie laughed. At her own suspicions as well as at his words.

"I'm that way because I—trust you, Mr. McBrayer."

"Whatever the reason, it makes for jubilance. By the way, couldn't it be just 'Thane' for our five, no, seven hours?"

"Of course it could—Thane," she agreed. "The first name of the person on your right is Ottilie."

"As if I didn't know," he chided.

"I THINK," said Thane when they met after donning their bathing suits, "you're the most delectable decoration on the beach."

"And you don't think this suit too—too bold?" Ottilie asked, accepting the compliment with due modestness, the hussy!

"Decidedly no!" Thane grinned down at her. "I'll wager that's plagiarized from friend *fiancé's* little book."

But Ottilie didn't take the wager. She made another: "Bet I can reach the raft first. It's deserted, I see."

Thane reached the water first, but Ottilie soon caught up to him as they swam. He thrust out a long arm and touched the raft before she did, but they scrambled onto it at precisely the same second.

"Oh," gasped Ottilie, "we both won!"

"Why, the idea. I won by a mile!" declared Thane.

"Well, if you're going to start cheating—" laughed Ottilie. She stretched her slim length on the sun-warmed wood. It was pleasant out there, away from the heat, noise and crowds. Pleasant to lie, looking up into the blue sky of summer and hear the lap-lap of the waves against the sides of the raft.

Just above the horizon hung a single cloud. Ottilie quoted softly:

"A little cloud on a summer's day,
When all the rest of Heaven is clear,
A cloud upon the atmosphere
That hath no business to appear
When skies are blue and earth is gay."

"The biggest storms start with a single cloud," Thane remarked bitterly. "I suppose each of us, when we contemplate marital life, imagines that there will be no clouds, or, if there are, that he can dissipate them before they mean a storm." Then, with a short laugh: "Scold me for moralizing on our desert island. Like Byron?"

"Of course. Chiefly, I suppose, because I was scolded for reading 'Don Juan' up in the attic one rainy day."

"You should've been spanked. Well, he was a great lad, and made the most of his life. Quite a swimmer, too. Come on, mer-princess, let's race each other back to shore, before I preach a real sermon."

Once more it was a dead heat.

"That settles it!" declared Thane. "I'll pick the next test and be sure it 'll be one that I can win."

"Huh," scoffed Ottilie. "Dare you to!" She tucked her thumbs under the armholes of her scant bathing suit and struck an attitude.

"Don't dare me too far, youngster." His voice held a warning.

Ottilie heeded it. But instead of making the teasing reply he so evidently wanted, she said: "I'm starving—had no lunch, y'know."

"Let's get dressed and go eat then."

"Ooh, no! Let's feast on hot dogs, waffles and ice cream. We can get an umbrella and have a regular picnic. Then afterward we can have another swim."

Thane eagerly carried out her suggestions. The late afternoon hours flew by on swift wings, but during those hours ideas and confidences were exchanged and friendship ripened. By the time that the rising wind and lowering temperature sent them to their bathhouses, they knew more of each other than they would ever have learned if they had spent ten years together in employer and employee relationship. Ottilie, briskly rubbing herself after the cold shower, began to doubt the wisdom of the suggestion that had led to this outing and those confidences. After this five-seven hours together, would life, she wondered anxiously, ever be the same again?

She shook off her foreboding, and when she emerged the eyes she raised to meet Thane's were clear and candid once more. They decided upon a "shore dinner," and ate with appetites whetted by their day in the open.

"I brought a flask — real, prewar stuff," began Thane.

"I don't drink," Ottilie interrupted.

"Nor I, but I thought all the youngsters did."

"I'm not exactly a youngster. I'm a business woman."

"And a first-rate one. Everything you do, you do well. You put your whole heart in it. To-day you played whole-heartedly, and, dash it all, made me do it too! Believe it or not, this is the first time since I was a lad that I've done such a thing."

"Are you," asked Ottilie, her black eyes smiling at him through sooty lashes, "scolding me or praising me?"

"Figure it oot f'yersel', mum," Thane teased.

"The answer I get is—praise," laughed Ottilie.

"My admiration for your modesty grows as you continue to display it," returned Thane, his eyes twinkling across at her.

"Being modest about your own assets gets you nowhere," Ottilie responded gayly. "But my first slip from demureness was—honestly it was—when I suggested that we celebrate, or, rather, offered myself as a substitute."

"For which slip I'm still thanking the gods!"

THE pleasant meal went on. Ottilie marveled that she felt more at ease with her employer than she had ever felt with her *fiancé*. She expressed herself frankly, unafraid that she would be chided. Instead of searching frantically for a topic of conversation, as she did when with Martin, there seemed to be endless intriguing things to discuss. Oddly enough, the one thing that she talked to Martin about was not mentioned at this festive dinner: shop talk. Nor was the reason for their celebrating mentioned.

"How the little cloud has grown," remarked Thane as they left the restaurant. "Afraid we're in for a storm."

"We should worry!" caroled Ottilie. "Nothing about us to melt."

"Huh, I'm not going to rise to that," sniffed Thane, "if it's a compliment y'r after, young lady." Then, seriously: "Honestly, Ottilie, you're a

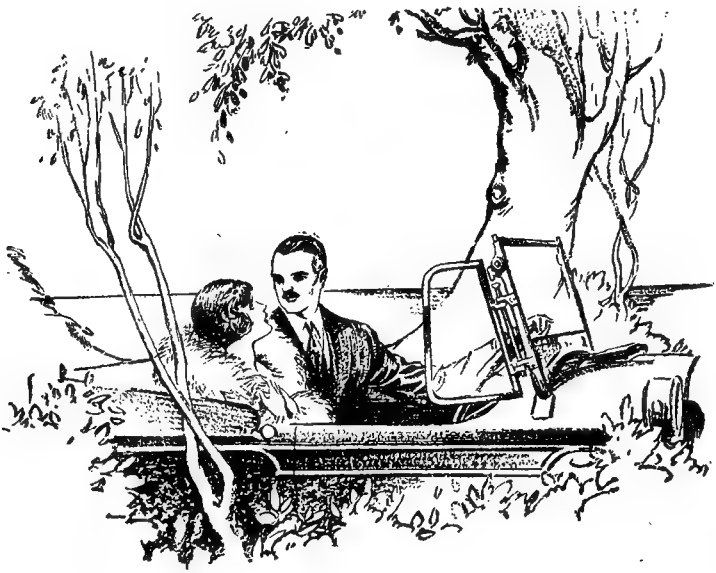
revelation! No thought of what rain might do to frills, feathers or make-up."

"As I don't tote the three commodities mentioned—"

"Oh, you know what I mean. You stay cheery under any and all circumstances."

ilie reflected. "Now let's ride on the scenic railway."

"You're supposed," Thane explained as the little car climbed after a breath-taking downward plunge, "to scream and clutch me as we descend. That makes it necessary for me to put a protecting arm about your quivering



"The best thing in life is being beloved by a beloved woman," he told her as he searched her wide eyes

"You've not seen me in a rage or you wouldn't say that. Let's stop being personal and make whoopee before it does rain. Is that a carousel I hear? Let's ride. Bet I catch the brass ring."

"With me aboard you won't," bragged Thane.

After three trips they decided there wasn't any brass ring.

"Well, we both lost that time," Ottform and, in the dark tunnel, I—"

Ottilie laughed. "'I'm not that kind of a gel, sir,' replied our heroine in a voice that tinkled like ice cubes in a glass."

"Stingy," accused Thane. But he kept his arm by his side.

Between them they won an atrocious-looking doll at one of the stands, which Ottilie declared was more pre-

cious than a real French doll. She hugged it to her as they walked back to the car, and cuddled it as they drove away from the beach.

Thane watched her, a strange look in his somber eyes. "Like babies, Ottilie?" he asked.

"Of course. Don't you?"

"Never had any close-ups of 'em, but I imagine being a fond parent is the second best thing there is." Deep feeling lay under the light tone.

"And the best?" Ottilie asked before she could stop herself.

"Being beloved by a beloved woman," he answered deliberately.

Ottilie was considerably startled, but she did not say so. Her eyes closed for a moment, and she drew a deep breath. She was glad that they were not face to face across a table. Once more doubt as to the wisdom of their twosing assailed her. Never could she look at him again without thinking of the yearning in his voice when he made that disconcerting statement. Always she would wish that it had been she who was the "beloved woman."

"There's Showplace." Thane indicated a road house on Merrick Road. "Tex Guinan's new home. Like to stop and dance, youngster?"

"Like to, but it's too late, Thane. I'm a working girl, and have to be in the office at 9 A.M. Mr. McBrayer and I have a hard day—many hard days ahead of us."

"Correct," agreed Thane. "Before we started you asked for something. At the cost of a great deal of time, trouble, and expense, I have produced it for you and—you've never even noticed it!"

"Haven't I, though? It's the gorgeous-est moon I ever saw. I wanted to speak of it miles back, but you were chattering so."

They looked up at the great, golden disk in silence."

"It's been the gorgeous-est day I've ever spent," Thane told her presently. "I shall remember it always."

"I, too," returned Ottilie with a little catch in her voice.

THANE looked down at her sharply and decreased the speed of the car, but she smiled up at him coolly enough. "The little cloud didn't grow into a storm after all," she observed.

"A good omen, Ottilie, eh?" His voice held that suppressed note which needed only the least encouragement to make it ardent.

Ottilie chose to ignore it. "I hope so," she told him earnestly. "I'm sure Miss Trask would have gone with you if she possibly could, and I'm glad you're not going to make a storm out of so small a cloud."

Thane stared down at her in pained surprise. "Why, I meant—" He paused, then went on: "Of course I'm not, little counselor."

At her door they stood a moment, looking up at the moon, now serenely sailing through fleecy clouds.

"Good night, Mr. McBrayer. It has been perfect."

Ottilie's voice was flat and weary. All her strength had been used to close the wonderful book which that day had opened for her. Just that one perfect page would she let herself read, for, fascinating as it was, it was not hers, but another's. She knew now that there was a possibility of keeping it for her own, if she made the effort; that but added to the heartbreaking task of returning it unread.

"Ottilie, you are tired." Thane's voice was anxious. "I'm thoughtless. Don't come in to-morrow. Rest—"

"I shall be on deck as usual," Ottilie cut in. "How could the place carry on without me?" She tried to inject a gay note into her question. Then: "Besides, I don't want to lose my job when I've decided to work for another six months. I'll try to sell Martin the idea that a December wedding beats a June wedding, so—" Her voice trailed off.

"Ottilie, Ottilie," Thane whispered uncontrollably.

"My job," said Ottilie gently, deliberately, "means just as much to me as yours does to you. Again—good night, Mr. McBrayer."

Thane's raised arms dropped to his sides with a hopeless gesture. His face was grim. "Good night, Miss Wylie," he answered. "That job will be yours for as long as you want it, and it will remain just the job it has always been." He turned abruptly and hurried back to his roadster.

Ottilie leaned against the door jamb, her head drooping, her nails cruel to her palms, using all her strength to keep from calling him back. So she remained until the car slid from view. Her breath escaped in a low sob and her body sagged, but she flung up her head and mocked the moon. "Bah, you're not silver at all, you cold thing. You're just a tin plate, and you have no beauty, now that he has gone."

She groped her way into the hallway. And then a thin scream broke from her pale, stiff lips. In the shadows stood the great hulk of Martin Coyle. After that one outcry Ottilie stood quite still, her hand pressed against her open mouth, her body swaying slightly.

Martin took one long stride and stood towering over her, his face convulsed with rage.

"Why, Martin," Ottilie mumbled against her hand. "You—you're quite a giant. Funny—" She laughed weakly and caught at the railing.

"I'm big enough and strong enough," blared Martin, "to break that skunk with my bare hands, and I'm going to do just that after I tell you a few things."

Rage swept away Ottilie's weariness and colored her pale face.

"Martin," she flared, "are you crazy or drunk?"

"Neither, you shameless—"

"Be careful, Martin," cut in Ottilie, forcing herself into calmness. "Don't say something you will regret. You have no cause to revile me nor to threaten Mr. McBrayer."

Martin glared at her speechlessly as she slipped by him and gained the stairs. Halfway up she turned and spoke over her shoulder: "As I am engaged to you, perhaps I owe it to you to explain."

Martin laughed. "Explain," he jeered. "Lie, you mean."

"You've known me many years, Martin. Have you ever known me to lie? You know you haven't. Come here to-morrow evening and—"

"I'll hear your story now or never," broke in Martin.

"I'm very tired," began Ottilie. Then: "But, come on up if you wish." She led the way to her apartment, feeling utterly weary again.

PERHAPS because she was so tired, or perhaps because, as she considered Martin sitting there glowering at her, animal like in his fury, she decided she did not want him after all, she faltered in the telling of her story, and did not succeed in convincing him. In the midst of the recital her thoughts kept wandering off to Thane. Then, as she recalled his

words, his gestures, his mobile face, her voice would trail off and she would bring herself back with an effort and grope for words.

Martin grew restive, then frankly impatient. "Making it up as you go along," he sneered, heaving himself out of his chair. "I'm through. With you, that is. As for McBrayer—" He looked down at his powerful hands with a laugh that was a menace.

Ottilie shuddered away from those cruel fingers, but she did not plead for mercy for Thane McBrayer. Her belief in him would not allow that. "Martin," she said evenly, "you've worked yourself up into a state bordering on the insane. Walk it off, or sleep it off. To-morrow you'll come to me and ask my pardon."

"To-morrow," retorted Martin violently, "you'll be picking up what's left of that lover of yours and trying to fit the pieces together again. But you won't be able to do it."

"It would take a better man than you to do all you threaten," Ottilie found strength to answer.

She reached her bedroom and slammed shut the door; then she collapsed on the bed. A cold darkness seemed to be closing in upon her. She struggled against it for a while and then succumbed. Ottilie fainted.

She fought her way back to consciousness and lay still for a while in the cool darkness. Then fear for Thane brought her to her feet. She stumbled out into the living room. Martin had gone. Snatching up the telephone, she gave the operator Thane's house number.

With relief she heard his impersonal "hello."

"Thane," she breathed.

"Ottilie! You!" His voice was warm, vibrant now.

"Listen to me, Thane," Ottilie said tensely. "Martin was waiting—"

"You—you're all right? He didn't—"

"No. Not me. You. He threatened to—to hurt you. You must avoid him. I called to warn you."

His laugh came to her across the wire. "You mustn't worry about me, child. Those who threaten seldom carry out their threats."

"Oh, you don't know Martin."

"And you don't know me, my dear," he retorted coldly.

Silence.

Then, in a apologetic tone, Thane said: "Forgive me, Ottilie. Thank you for calling. Forewarned is forearmed."

"You will be careful?" Ottilie asked anxiously.

"Of course. Say, you didn't plead for mercy for me, or anything like that, did you, youngster?"

"Indeed not!" Ottilie answered indignantly.

"Good girl. I'd hate to have you afraid for me, y' know."

"I'm not," Ottilie assured him stoutly. "But, Martin is so strong and his imagination has fired his temper and—"

"There, there, go to bed and forget it, like a sensible girl."

"Good night, Mr. McBrayer."

"Good night, little pal."

After she had hung up, she whispered: "Good night, dear one."

NEXT morning, refreshed from a good sleep, Ottilie hurried to the office, feeling that she must have dreamed the part about Martin, his threats, and her subsequent call to Thane. The everyday routine quieted her fears and made her inclined to laugh at herself and her fancies, es-

pecially her sudden and, of course, absurd infatuation for her employer.

When he arrived, only a few minutes after nine, Ottilie's first reaction was relief that he was safe; her second, absolute certainty that laughing at herself wouldn't help. She loved Thane McBrayer, and nothing in the world could change her.

Her greeting, however, gave no hint of this, and the eyes she raised to his were untroubled.

For some time it was very quiet in the room. Suddenly the door leading from the elevators was flung open. Upon the threshold stood Irene Trask. Behind her, and peering over her head was a languid individual wearing a monocle.

Thane, who had jumped to his feet at their intrusion, now strode across the room toward them, his face white and his mouth grim. As he passed Ottilie's desk, he said gently: "I'd like you to go, Miss Wylie."

"She can stay right here," shrilled Irene. "I've got something to say to the little pirate, the sneaking—"

"That's enough, Irene," cut in Thane.

Ignoring him, his *fiancée* went on: "Yesterday, when I found you two here alone, I was suspicious—"

"Irene, you must have taken leave of your senses," burst out Thane. "I explained why I had let my employees go home. I can show you the letter from the White Circle people to prove it."

"You're clever enough to prove anything," sneered his *fiancée*. "But you can't deny taking this person out yesterday, can you?"

"Of course I don't deny it! But it was you who suggested that I take Miss Wylie out—'skylarking' was the word you used."

"I suggested you go out with another woman!" scoffed Irene. "Likely story!"

Ottilie had been listening in amazement and panic. Suddenly she flared: "You know you suggested it, Miss Trask. Besides, what harm was there in our spending the afternoon and evening as we did?"

"None," was the ready answer. "Nor was there any harm in your entertaining my *fiancé* in your apartment after midnight, I suppose."

Ottilie and Thane answered as one in quick denial of this.

Irene's thin, scarlet lips twisted into a triumphant smile. "Mr. Sands and I know better. We waited on the stairs leading from your floor to the one above, and we heard you and Thane come up and go into your apartment and the door shut after you."

This time three voices denied the allegation. The third voice dominated. It was that of Martin Coyle, who had been standing outside the door.

"I was the man who went upstairs with Miss Wylie last night." He gave Irene a withering look and stepped up to her escort. "You heard my voice," he snapped. "Was I the one or not?"

Sands looked up at the young giant towering over him. "You were," he agreed. "But, last night I thought—"

"Never mind what you thought," interrupted Martin. "Beat it or—" He thrust a huge fist uncomfortably close to the man's face.

Sands stepped back hastily. "I'll wait downstairs for you, Irene," he said, and hurried away.

"NOW, Irene," said Thane sternly, "just why did you make that scene?"

"I do not care to discuss my affairs before this girl," returned Irene icily.

Ottilie stood up quickly and hurried from the room, only too glad to escape.

After a miserable hour spent walking up and down the drafting room, pretending to be interested in various plans that were being drawn, Ottilie heard Irene Trask leave.

When she returned to the private office she found Thane at his desk, his head in his hands. At her entrance he looked up.

"Can you ever forgive me?" he asked sorrowfully.

"There's nothing to forgive," Ottilie answered simply. "It was I, if you remember, who suggested the fatal adventure." She tried to speak lightly and smiled up at him.

"Gallant of you to put it like that," Thane returned. "You won't quit me now? I mean resign your position because of this?"

"Of course not. How could you manage without me?"

"I never intend to manage without you again," he told her.

"There's Martin," Ottilie reminded him.

"Yes, there's Martin. I shall have to talk to Martin severely. Where can I find him?"

"Oh, you mustn't meet Martin. He would carry out his threats."

"Suppose I make him see the error of his ways, convince him that he does want to marry you after all?" Thane interposed in a low, strangled voice.

Ottilie gasped. Loving him as she did, it was torture to hear him suggest that he bring Martin back to her.

"Martin and I," she answered coldly, "can manage our own affairs. You'll have all you can do when you meet him to look out for yourself, Mr. McBrayer."

Thane stiffened as if she had used bullets instead of short, sharp words. "I beg your pardon," he murmured after an amazed silence.

Ottilie's yearning eyes followed him as he strode out of the room. It took all her will power not to call him back and tell him that it was because she loved him so utterly that she had been so cruel.

WHEN Thane reëntered the room later in the day he was once again her employer and —nothing more. During his absence, Ottilie had hoped that this would be so and had coerced her own emotions to outward calmness.

For six months they maintained that status.

There was, however, one break in the veneer. One day Thane did not return from luncheon. He had appointments with important contractors during the afternoon, Ottilie knew. Nevertheless she felt uneasy and then decidedly anxious. When, for the third time, she told an irritated client that her employer had been unavoidably detained, she was on the verge of collapse.

The head draftsman added to her panic by suggesting that hospitals or police be called. He knew something must have happened, he said, for he and Thane had arranged to check up on a big job that afternoon. Ottilie insisted that they wait. If nothing had happened, Thane would be angry at the sensation their calls would have made. If something had happened, they would hear soon enough.

AT four o'clock Thane telephoned. Ottilie's relief was so great that she could not hide it. "Thane," she gasped, "tell me that you're all right."

"I cannot tell a lie," was Thane's

answer, but in so chipper a tone that she knew he was joking. "I'm far from being all right. I had the ill luck to run into an oversized bimbo who swung an oversized paw at me. Result, for me, one shiner."

"Thane! Tell me what happened," Ottilie demanded tensely.

"I told you what happened to me. Interested in him?"

"Please, don't tease. I've been frantic."

"How foolish of you. I'll be at the office, black eye and all, to-morrow morning, you may tell any irate customers. G'by."

"Wait—wait. Was it—Martin?"

"Oh, you want to know about Martin? Hard on a girl when she has two men to worry about."

"Thane, that doesn't sound like you. You're not—"

"Sure, I'm drunk! A man doesn't beat up a two hundred pound riveter every week in the year. I'm drunk with success though, not anything else. You might send Martin some lilies," he added with a chuckle and hung up.

Ottilie sat at her desk, torn between anxiety and exultation, until the head draftsman appeared once more. "Mr. McBrayer has had a slight accident," she told him. "He'll be in to-morrow."

The man gave her an oblique look, and Ottilie wondered just how much of the telephone conversation Marge had broadcasted.

All evening she fought off the desire to call up Thane.

When he arrived the next morning, she looked up apprehensively. Thane, she saw, had acquired not only a black eye, but a swagger. He had the air of a conqueror or a small boy who has, to his own amazement, knocked out the town bully. But Thane's greeting was the usual courteous and dignified one.

"I'm sorry," he added, "if my absence caused you any anxiety or annoyance, but it was unavoidable." That was his only reference to the affair.

Ottilie learned from one of the office boys, who had it from his uncle who was on the "force," that there had been quite a scrap. According to her gloating informer, "the boss stopped a fast one with his eye before he knew there was a fight on; then he was so mad about it that he sailed into the big guy and let him have something you'd never guess the boss packed." Apparently it was all over in a few seconds, but even the police officer who separated them named Thane the victor, though he admitted that Martin probably would have come back with a rush if given time.

After that there was no other break in the regular routine of business. Thane was as considerate and friendly as he had been all along. He continued to be the ideal employer.

It grew increasingly difficult for Ottilie, after the fight episode, to maintain her businesslike attitude toward the man she loved. To be with him day after day and to be no more than the desk or any other piece of office furniture was unbearable. Still, the thought of leaving and not seeing him at all was even worse.

ONE morning, about six months after their day at Long Beach, Thane came over to Ottilie's desk.

Without preliminaries, he began: "Last June you were kind enough to consent to stay on here for another six months. If you will break Miss Staley in during the remainder of the week, you are free to leave Christmas Eve

and I will give you a month's extra salary. Now, now, don't thank me. You've earned it."

Ottilie felt as if he had given her a blow over the heart and knocked her senseless. She struggled for coherent thought and then for coherent speech. By the time she had gained both, Thane was busy at his own desk. She bit back her words, but couldn't control her tears. For a moment she felt that she positively hated him. That flash saved her from making an exhibition of herself.

Pride came to her rescue.

She heard herself asking Marge, over the telephone, to send Miss Staley in. One tiny bit of satisfaction was hers: Thane's surprise that she was putting his orders into action so soon.

CHRISTMAS Eve came at last. As in previous years, there was a Christmas tree in the drafting rooms, surrounded by tiny models of various buildings for which the firm had made plans during the year. The men took great pride in these little cardboard affairs and worked on them at odd times for months in advance. There were presents for every one from the dime store and cake and coffee sent up from the restaurant downstairs.

Ottilie would have given anything if she could have slipped out at noon

"I was the man who went upstairs with Miss Wylie last night!"

and so missed the Christmas party. But because of her imminent departure she was to be queen of the jollifications, and she knew—Marge never could keep a secret—that there would be a real present from *Santa* for her.

The drafting tables were arranged to form a hollow square about the big, gayly dressed tree with its attendant village and heaps of tissue-wrapped presents. There was a scramble for seats and much giggling and "wise cracking" as *Santa* appeared in his regulation costume. While the refreshments were being served he gave out the ridiculous presents. There was one for every one from Thane to the smallest office boy. With each went a bit of advice and a joke, which were both taken in good spirit.

Then came the big moment. Ottilie knew it was that from the way every one quieted down and looked at her. With a flourish, *Santa* produced from his pocket a small package and presented it to "Our Little Boss, whom we all love and shall miss like—" the rest was lost in the applause.

Ottilie, eyes misty, fingers unsteady, managed to tear off the covering. A pressure of her thumb on the catch of the little white velvet box snapped open the lid and revealed a wrist watch set with diamonds.

Ottilie gasped; her mouth trembled and her chin quivered. Frankly she brushed away a tear and flashed a smile at the eager faces about her.

"Thank you," she choked. "Oh, thank you all. It's lovely."

"Put it on!" cried several voices.

"Mr. McBrayer, you put it on for her," some one called out.

With a grin that was boyish in its bashfulness Thane complied. Applause and demands for a speech followed. Ottilie stood up and looked about helplessly. Then she raised the watch to her lips and kissed it. "You'll have to take that for a speech," she said and sat down.

More applause. *Santa,* it appeared, had another present. This, also, was a small one, even tinier than the other. Intuition warned Ottilie, but she had to go through with it. Judging from the faces of the others, the contents of the box was as much a secret to them as to her. As before, she put her thumb on the catch.

This time she flashed a look at Thane before she pressed it. His flushed eager face betrayed him, but it did not prepare her for what was in the box. For a long moment she stared down at the square cut diamond that winked back at her as the light struck it.

Before she could trust herself to look up Marge whispered: "It's from the boss. Ain't it a wow of a ring?"

The others crowded around, all praising the exquisite bauble.

Suddenly a daring voice shouted: "You've got to put that on, too, Mr. McBrayer!"

Ottilie felt the blood rush to her cheeks. Silently she thrust out her right hand as Thane held out his for the ring. Instead of doing as she wanted him to—slip the ring on the third finger of her right hand—he caught the hand in his and drew her to her feet. Those near by stepped aside, and before she realized his intention Thane had her out of the drafting room and into his private office.

"Ottilie," he began without delay, "let me explain this. First, I must tell you that I am free. Free to put this ring on the third finger of your left hand. That is, if you'll ever forgive this mix up."

"I—I'm afraid I don't understand.

Surely you didn't mean to propose to me before the whole crowd?"

"Of course I didn't. I'm proposing in here, where it's strictly private, you little goose. Ottilie, I love you with all my heart and have ever since that day, particularly that minute when you cuddled that absurd doll and didn't gush and blat when I asked you if you loved children. Will you marry me, dear one, and make me the happiest man on earth?"

HE drew her into his arms and looked down at her with his soul in his eyes. "Will you?" he asked again. "I love you and will be true to you and won't go adventuring with my new secretary."

"To be sure of that, I'd have to remain your secretary," she said pertly and got herself most thoroughly kissed.

"That," she said presently, "was the best argument of 'em all, Thane. Y'know, I've been wanting to hear that one for a long, long time."

"Hussy! Just for that, I'll wish that argument's whole family on you." He proceeded to do so.

"Letting me kiss you like that," he chided after a long while, "and not even engaged to me."

He slipped the sparkling diamond on her finger and sealed it with another "argument."

"No," he went on, "I'll elucidate. It was not until *Santa* came to me for my present for you, just before the party, that I knew what they'd bought you. I'd bought you—this." He reached into his pocket and brought out a diamond wrist watch.

"Y'see, I just couldn't crab their act, could I, darling?"

"N-o-o, but I bet you're the first man ever gave his girl the engagement ring before his whole office force."

"I quit betting with you long ago. From now on it'll be just one argument after another."

An interval of "arguments."

Then Ottilie demanded: "When did you know that you were free?"

"The day I up and told you to begone from this office."

"Oh!" Ottilie pouted and tried to look angry. "How cruel of you not to tell me why you were throwing me out."

"It was like this, dearest one," he said gravely. "I wanted you to be very sure of yourself. My intention was to let you go and, after a week of separation, ask you; but you see what happened."

Ottilie cried: "I shall always love this wrist watch." Once more she kissed the face of the watch on her wrist. "It saved me a whole week of misery." She finished on a note half mocking, half serious.

"Well, that makes it unanimous. Let's go thank the gang."

With a catch in her voice she cried: "I want to go home, Thane."

"Sure," he soothed. "Got that arranged, too. *Our* home, baby. But, first, I've simply got to tell the bunch what a lucky guy I am."

"And," added Ottilie, "I've got to reëstablish my reputation. I've been in here alone with you and this diamond ring long enough to lose it."

At the door he stopped short.

"Remember," he said, "how I warned you about small clouds. We mustn't cultivate the smallest of clouds, young woman."

"Not even a haze will be allowed to park on our marital horizon," promised Ottilie, as she slipped her fingers into those of the man she loved. And, before the opened door, their lips joined in a long, rapturous kiss.

The Night Club Mystery

Love shines like a star over the abyss into which the soul of Barry Cabot has been plunged

By ELIZABETH JORDAN

Author of "Miss Nobody from Nowhere," "Black Butterflies," etc.

THE STORY SO FAR:

IT was a case of childhood friendship ripening into love when, at the age of twenty-three, Barry Cabot proposed marriage to Janet Perry, three years younger, at her apartment in New York City. The proposal was unconvincing, not through any lack of sincerity, but because Barry was worried over a matter which could be traced back fourteen years to the time when he and Janet had lived in adjoining homes in the quiet old New England town of Wheaton.

You see, it was this way:

Barry, an orphan, was being reared by his Aunt Marcia. He had been given a

fishing rod on his ninth birthday, and was very unhappy because his aunt would not let him go alone to Swift River. And there was no one available to accompany the lad, so he lingered around the front gate disconsolately.

A stranger, J. C. Bleecker, of New York, visiting Wheaton on business, agreed to take Barry on an all-day fishing trip. The two set out, with lunch, and the man was so companionable and understanding that he won his way into the boy's heart. Barry idolized him thereafter for the rest of his life even though, unknown to young Cabot, nearly fourteen years were to elapse before their next meeting.

Next door to the Cabots lived Janet and her aunt, Mrs. Anne Perry. Janet was a fun-loving maiden, lithe, brown-eyed and winsome, with delightful brunette curls and the slender tapering fingers of an æsthetic nature. Her lips were chastely beautiful and, when parted, revealed perfectly formed teeth of surpassing whiteness. Even as a child her voice had an unforgetably appealing quality which suggested music drifting through a field of arum lilies at sunset.

Her mother was dead. All that Janet knew of her father was that he was a bridge builder in South America, whom she had never seen, but who kept her generously supplied with money.

Barry and Janet were playmates together, but when they grew up they gradually drifted apart. The boy went to Harvard, while the girl was sent to a fashionable finishing school.

At the time of Aunt Marcia's death, when Barry was twenty, Janet proved to be a ministering angel, smoothing the sufferer's pathway through the shining gates. It was then that the first flash of mature sympathy passed between Janet and Barry.

Barry was not surprised when at dinner that night he found himself seated beside the engaging Nancy Howson

They were separated soon afterward, however; the girl embarking upon a musical career and young Cabot traveling abroad and later obtaining a position in a New York bank through the influence of old Colonel Jessup, with whom Barry and Janet shared a mutual friendship.

Their correspondence had died out. The two had not met in three years, when Barry accidentally discovered that Janet, now flowered into beautiful young woman-

hood, was living in the same apartment house with him—a pleasant surprise!

"You're rather stunning, big boy," she murmured, after their first greetings. "But then, I always knew you would be."

"You've developed into a sort of fairy princess yourself," Barry said, looking at her admiringly.

Janet explained that she was taking singing lessons and occasionally giving "whoopee" parties in her apartment.

Barry disapproved of the whoopee, but was too surprised and happy to spoil the delicious moment of reunion by voicing his objections.

Later, at the suggestion of Verna Morris, a night club hostess, Barry dropped in on one of Janet's parties to learn what she was doing, and he took her whole "gang" to the Cockcrow Night Club for an evening's revelry.

Meanwhile, J. C. Bleecker had turned up again—as a depositor in the bank where Barry was employed—under the name of Brian Strong. In many ways he was a fine character, courteous and fair, but professionally he was a gambler. Ward Howson, branch manager of the bank and nephew of its president, warned Barry that Mr. Strong was associating with underworld characters.

Indeed, the night Barry went to the Cockcrow he learned that the idol of his boyhood was there also, and was playing for heavy stakes in a little room, from which, as the night advanced, emanated sounds of quarreling and then two revolver shots.

A dying man staggered out of that room, paused in front of where Barry was sitting with Janet, then made his way through a narrow corridor to a rear exit, followed by a gunman of catlike movements. Then the lights went out.

Barry hurried his frightened girl friend out the same exit and got into the only available cab with her. The fugitive gunman—later identified as Tony Bosco, "Tony the Cat"—slipped into the same taxi, despite Barry's protests, and stayed there until he was safely out of the neighborhood.

The victim, Dan Skelly, a notorious gambler, died without naming his assailant. Barry and Janet determined to keep out of the case, to avoid jeopardizing their professional careers. Janet vowed never to enter another night club and to drop the crowd of parasites which had been sponging upon her. She was cured, she said.

The police floundered about futilely, seeking some one upon whom they could pin the murder charge, while the newspapers insistently demanded action. Finally the underworld picked upon Brian Strong as the most convenient scapegoat.

The latter hastily withdrew a large sum from the bank, through his henchman, Dink the Shadow, and was arrested shortly afterward. Barry had a talk with him, and Mr. Strong decided the time was not yet ripe for the young man to come forward with his testimony. It might even be possible, the suspect pointed out, that Barry's evidence would not be needed at all, in which case young Cabot and Janet would avoid undesirable publicity.

After his chat with Mr. Strong, Barry went to Janet's apartment to explain the whole situation. It was then that he made his first declaration of love to her, and the unconvincing proposal followed.

CHAPTER XVIII

BARRY did not sleep well that night after his confidential talks with Brian Strong and with Janet. The girl had looked at him with an expression which sent him to bed puzzled and depressed. Evidently she was planning something which she did not see fit to reveal to him.

He was not cheered by the contents of his newspapers the next morning. It was "rumored" that Brian Strong would be held in the Tombs without bail, not as a material witness, but as the suspected murderer of Dan Skelly.

Three newspapers mentioned that Barry Cabot had visited the gambler just after his arrest. Barry expected a call to Howson's office as a result of this. The branch manager would wish to see him, if only to satisfy his own curiosity. But a much more impres-

sive summons came to him during the morning. Young Howson delivered it in person.

"Say, old man," he announced, coming into Barry's cage a little after ten o'clock and wasting one of Uncle Alfred's best expressions on his assistant's unseeing back, "the president wants to see you."

Barry groaned. Five minutes later he was wafted in an elevator to that sumptuous suite of offices on the second floor of the building which the distinguished president of the great chain of banks had made his headquarters.

"Sit down, Cabot," his great superior began, motioning to a chair. "I see you're in the morning news."

"Yes, sir," Barry flushed. "I'm very sorry," he went on. "I know it must be annoying to you—in that connection."

"It's not exactly the advertising we want," the president agreed with a rather pinched smile.

Alfred E. Howson, still in the mid afternoon of life, was the professionally amiable type of executive whose amiability deserted him frequently and with extreme abruptness. He had been a good fellow and a sportsman in his youth, but his character had deteriorated under the corroding effects of too many board meetings.

Barry was not sure how long this present calm would last. He smiled disarmingly.

"Mr. Strong wanted to know his exact balance in the bank," he mentioned.

"He could have got that information in two minutes by telephoning for it."

"I gathered that he wanted it given confidentially. When he asked for it I wrote it on a slip of paper, and I noticed that he dropped the slip into the fire as soon as he had looked at it."

"What else did he want?"

"He wanted me to take charge of his roll. His man, Dink the Shadow, cashed a check for thirty thousand at our bank a few days ago. Mr. Strong gave me ten thousand dollars to keep till he needed it. I suppose he didn't want to carry too much cash to the Tombs."

"That's that." The president's interest in the episode seemed exhausted, for he spoke dryly. "And now, Cabot, perhaps you will be good enough to tell me why Brian Strong really sent for you."

Howson's benignity returned as suddenly as it had departed, and he smiled into the young man's troubled eyes.

"My boy," he said kindly, "I didn't bring you up here this morning because of what I had read in the newspapers. I meant to send for you in any case, because of a long talk I had about you last night with my old friend, Nicholas Jessup. Now that you're here, I'm asking you frankly whether Strong is using that youthful hero worship of yours, and your decent human sense of obligation to him, to pull you down with him?"

"You think he's really down, sir?"

Barry asked the question to gain time, but his heartbeats quickened as he waited for the answer.

"He's down, and he's going to stay down, and the pack will tear him to pieces. They've got to—to save their own skins. I told Ward all this some time ago, and expected him to pass it on to you as an additional reason for you to keep clear of Strong. Strong will make a good fight, of course, but he hasn't a chance."

"And the colonel told you—"

There was understanding in Uncle Alfred, for he turned his eyes from the young man's face.

"I think," he said, "that Colonel Jessup repeated to me most of what you told him. As I've said, he and I are old friends, and he knew your confidence would be as safe with me as with him. Moreover, he wanted my judgment as to your situation in this matter, and my support in any future difficulties that may come up. I promised him both, subject, of course, to the effect any publicity concerning you might have on the bank."

He did not add, and Barry did not suspect, that Nicholas Jessup had won this concession by confessing to the president his own intentions concerning the promising youngster they were discussing.

"He doesn't suspect it," Jessup had said, "but I'm leaving him most of what I have, partly because I'm fond of him, but principally, I suppose, because I've no one else to leave it to. He's a fine lad, and he ought to be a big figure in New York some day. I shall not change my will unless he gets into some scandal or matrimonial noose that will do for him; but there's no question that he's in a jam just now, and I'm afraid he'll need all the help we can give him to pull him out of it. He's a headstrong young devil."

Howson had agreed affably. His interest in an up and coming young assistant teller with a couple of hundred thousand of his own had not been vital, even though Barry had made an unusually good record in his first two years at banking. But if the up and coming assistant were to inherit most of the Jessup millions, that was something else again.

Howson's interest expanded like an opening flower. Of course, the young ass must be kept from entanglements that would imperil a brilliant future.

"It would be a great pity," he told Barry, "if after the fine start you've made you let some quixotic impulse undo all you have accomplished. Your name came up at a board meeting a few weeks ago; and I don't suppose it will be any surprise to you to hear that you're right in line for Palmer's place when we push him up, as we expect to do the first of the year. It would be unfortunate if you should gain any more undesirable advertising between now and then."

Barry repeated Strong's confidence in so far as it affected himself, and Howson listened with an expression of deepening gravity.

"You see how it is," the young man ended. "If he's all right I can keep out of the way. But if he's down—"

"If he's down—and he is—it will do him no good to ruin you, too."

Howson spoke with the irritation of a strong man whose personal wishes and plans are being interfered with. Then his expression brightened. Again his gaze settled on his finger tips. Those admirably cared for fingers of his controlled many wires. In one way or another he could get the message to Strong that young Cabot was not to be interfered with.

In the meantime he had promised Jessup to attend to another little matter. He turned toward his employee the effulgence of his best board meeting smile.

"However, his promise gives you a long interval," he continued with obvious relief. "Mr. Strong can't call for you unless he's convicted, and even at that he can't possibly be convicted for months. Let's forget him for the time being. Mrs. Howson and I are having a few young people to dinner

to-night—friends of my daughter's. My nephew, Ward, will be there, and we shall be glad if you can join us."

"Thank you, I shall be delighted."

Barry reflected that the invitation would keep him away from Janet that night. It was a pity. He had meant to take her out to dinner and to try to learn what lay behind the strange look she had given him when they parted. But, of course, she would understand that a dinner invitation from a bank president to a youthful employee was like the command of royalty.

"Very good," said Alfred E. Howson. "Eight o'clock, then. Good morning."

Barry felt himself borne from the room on a receding wave of the veteran bank president's friendly interest. It was a pleasant thought.

Nancy was an enchanting dancer. Barry soon felt amazingly well acquainted with her

CHAPTER XIX

BARRY was not surprised when at dinner that night he found himself seated beside the engaging Nancy Howson.

Nancy was a vivacious little blonde, with eyes of cornflower blue and hair as delicately golden as the shimmer of sunrise on the Hudson. Barry had met her for a moment in the drawing-room just before dinner, and she had at once informed him, apparently with pleasure, that he was to take her in. She was a nice girl—not a beauty, but fresh and young and wholesome. She enjoyed life, and assumed that every one else did.

Over the oysters she informed Barry that he was "just the image of Dick Barthelmess." He airily assured Miss Howson that when he looked at her he saw no resemblance to any one else, for there was no other girl like her.

The entente between them deepened under the approving eyes of Alfred E., who wore the look of a man that had kept a promise to a friend. In fancy, Barry saw the two old pals plotting together.

"Ask him to your home, Howson. Let him meet your daughter. He won't know how nice a girl can be till he sees Nancy."

Thus the colonel. Barry could almost hear him say it. And those four

venerable hands, such powerful hands in New York, were pushing him and Nancy together.

Barry smiled into Nancy's eyes, but between them and his own he saw the wistful brown orbs of Janet, with that odd look in them, and the face of Brian Strong.

To him the evening was a disturbed dream. He didn't want to be among all these people. He wanted to be with the only person who could divert his thoughts from Strong. But he played the rôle he knew had been assigned to him. There was dancing after dinner, and he coolly wrote his name three times on Nancy's card, regardless of the pathetic protests of other young men pressing around her.

He danced the first dance with Nancy, and was momentarily irritated by the surprise with which she spoke of his skill. Like Janet, she had evidently expected him to be awkward and inexperienced on the floor. The fact annoyed him, though Nancy put it very nicely.

"I thought you were too busy and too much of a highbrow to go in for this sort of thing," she said.

Nancy was an enchanting dancer. Barry liked her, and soon felt amazingly well-acquainted with her. To be with her in other conditions would have been like taking a bracing walk along the seashore.

The other girls at the party were attractive, too, and he dutifully danced every dance. But all the time he saw those brown eyes—and that last odd look—

Reaching home a little after twelve o'clock, he wondered whether it would be possible to see Janet that night, and tentatively put the question to the General, as the liveried doorman was called.

"I wonder if Miss Perry is in, and whether she's up," he observed. "If she is I'd like to see her for a moment. You might telephone to her rooms—"

He became aware that the General was gazing at him with the bulging eyes of one with tidings.

"Why, didn't you know, sir?" The General's voice dripped surprise and importance. "The ladies—Miss Perry and her aunt—moved out to-day. I thought, of course, they'd of told you."

"Moved!" Barry stared at him, refusing to take in the word. "Moved!" he repeated more flatly. "When? Where?"

"This afternoon, sir, right after lunch. I don't know where. They didn't say. It was very sudden like. You see, they rented furnished, so all they had to take was their trunks and Miss Perry's big piano. It wasn't my business to ask for addresses."

Something in the look of the young man must have touched him, for his voice softened. None knew better than the General what good friends these two young things had been, and how many pleasant outings they had enjoyed together. For months he had watched them come and go, and a fine couple he had thought them, though the lady was a bit gay.

"Don't you worry, Mr. Cabot," he said cajolingly. "Of course the young lady has left you a note. Perhaps you'll find it under your door."

That was the end of the General's verbal orgy. Barry was leaping up the staircase.

But there was no note from his sweetheart, as he discovered when he entered the room, flashed on his lights, and nervously ran through the letters that lay on his desk. He recalled the look in Jan's eyes; and now, at last, he felt that he understood it.

It was not until he turned from the desk that he saw a vague figure emerging from behind a swaying curtain.

"Dink!" he cried out in amazement, and added almost roughly. "How the devil did you get in here?"

Dink showed his yellow teeth in the grimace he evidently considered a smile, and held out a note. Still standing under one of the side lights in his room, Barry read the note at a glance.

DEAR CABOT:

Please give Dink, who will call on you, the roll I handed you last night. I find I'll need it sooner than I expected. This is almost my swan song, old man. You won't be disturbed again for a long time to come. Good fishing! B. S.

Barry went to the small safe unostentatiously set in a wall of his dressing room, and, returning with Strong's wad, put it into the fingers stretched forth to clutch it. Then Dink slipped away, out of the second-story window which he had left open.

Taking his worries to the bank the next morning, as had become his recent unpleasant habit, Barry found himself longing for a sympathetic ear and an understanding heart.

In connection with his worry over Janet, the right person at once came to mind. Verna Morris had taken it upon herself to advise him ten days ago, and he was now struggling in the quicksands to which her advice had led him. The least she could do was to point the way out, if any such way existed.

Yes, he would call up Verna, make an appointment with her for supper at Jake's, and learn what she knew about Janet's departure and what she would advise. A subconscious hint that another visit to a supper club just at present was not exactly discreet was coldly ignored by his conscious mind. He couldn't expect the girl to come to him a second time.

The other oracle he needed did not come to mind so readily, but at last he thought of Ned Wheeler, criminal courts reporter. He decided to invite Wheeler to lunch with him, and they met at the Harvard Club that day.

"Do you think Strong is to be framed?" Barry asked.

"I guess there's no doubt of it," Wheeler replied. "He may be guilty at that."

"Impossible! They can't even prove that Strong was with Skelly that night."

"Oh, yes they can. They've got four witnesses now who will admit that they were in the room at the time of the shooting—Big Jim Bosco, Ed Wallis, Jackknife Casey, and the Featherbed—and they'll all swear that Strong was there, too. Want the dope? Well, as I understand it, this is about their story."

Wheeler checked off the important points on his fingers as he went on.

"Every gambler has streaks of bad luck. Skelly had been losing steadily for months, losing enormous sums. He owed the two Boscos more than a hundred thousand, and welched on paying them. He said the Boscos had cheated him. The Boscos said he made that claim simply because he hadn't the money to pay. The Boscos said Skelly also owed Strong and Mantell sixty or seventy thousand each in gambling debts. Strong and Mantell admit that, but they claim they were not concerned about the money, and were giving Skelly all the time he needed, knowing he'd pay sooner or later. Feeling between Skelly and the Boscos ran mighty high. The Boscos kept bothering Skelly, and every time the three

men met there was a row. All clear so far?"

"Yes."

"Then here's the rest. I'm giving you the underworld dope. Skelly persuaded Strong and Mantell to sit in a game with himself and the Boscos. His idea was that if they did, they'd catch on to the Boscos's tricks. Strong and Mantell's idea was that Skelly was a bit off his head because of his losses—he'd got so he couldn't sleep—and that they could help to straighten things out. They didn't think the Boscos would try any funny business with them in the game, even though they were crooked, as Skelly said they were. The six—the two Boscos, Skelly, Mantell, Wallis and Strong—played pretty steadily that night from eleven till three o'clock. Mantell and Strong didn't see anything crooked, but all of a sudden Skelly had a brain storm and swore he did. He threw down his cards and started a row then and there. Dink, Strong's man, had been in the room till two and then drifted away. Jackknife and the Featherbed, the Boscos' handy men, didn't play, of course. They were merely watchers and errand boys. Others were in and out, but they don't count. When the argument started, the six players—the two Boscos, Strong and Mantell, Skelly and Wallis, and the two gangsters, Jackknife and the Featherbed, were in the room."

"But I thought they couldn't prove that Tony Bosco—"

"Wait a minute. That's the point. I tell you I'm giving you the dope that's going around."

"Sorry. I won't interrupt again."

"All right. Where was I? Oh, yes. All six men were all on their feet now, and Skelly did some mighty rough talking. He told the Boscos just what he thought of them, and he thought plenty. He said things men of that sort don't forgive."

Barry remembered the loud voices in the room off the corridor, which he and Janet had heard. Janet! The very thought of her came now like a stab in the heart.

"Strong and Mantell tried to quiet him. They told him the Boscos had played a straight game, but that made Skelly more furious than ever. He raved around, cursing them all, even Strong and Mantell; swore they were in with the Boscos, swore he'd never pay a cent to any of them! He seemed to be working the venom out of his system, though, and getting quieter, so Mantell decided the worst was over, and went off to the wash room.

"Strong suggested that they all have a drink. In his lunging about Skelly had knocked the bottles off the table, so Strong went to a corner table and drew the cork out of a full bottle of whisky standing there. For those few seconds—no more than that—he was standing with his back to the others. See?

"Neither he nor Mantell had the slightest notion that there was to be any shooting. I don't think the others had, either. But Skelly was still cursing and accusing the Boscos, and swearing he'd drive them out of the country. In those two seconds, while he stood with his back to them opening that whisky bottle, Strong heard the shots behind him. When he turned Skelly was still standing, but crumpled up over the table."

Barry listened, but his thoughts were divided between the murder at the Cockcrow and the spiritual beauty of the girl he had cherished away back in those days when they had played together in the village of Wheaton.

"Strong saw them all," Wheeler went on, "but it was the tableau made by the Boscos that hit him hardest. If ever two faces told a whole story, theirs did. Big Jim was staring across the table at his brother with utter amazement and horror in his face, while Tony was simply livid with fright. The next instant the lights went out. I suppose one of the gangsters switched them off. But Strong knew what had happened—and I guess it wasn't long before he knew what would happen to him."

"But if Tony Bosco shot Skelly, I don't see—"

"I'm telling you," Wheeler said patiently. "Skelly alive was worth more to the Boscos than Skelly dead. But when Tony the Cat gets angry, he loses his head. Tony had been in countless knifings and shootings, but he never killed before, so far as we know, and his brother could always get him out of his troubles. When he shot Skelly he gave 'Big Jim' some job—and the realization of it was right there in Jim's face, and in Tony's panic when he came to his senses. Then Big Jim saw his way out. Tony's the one thing he loves, the apple of his eye. He'd send a thousand men to the chair to save Tony if he had to, but he decided that one would be enough."

"But why don't you print all this, if you know it?"

"I don't *know* it. I've been told it, and it sounds all right. But how are we going to prove it? Mantell will testify that Tony was one of the players, but it's his word and Strong's against the other four."

Wheeler shook hands warmly and dashed off, while Barry returned to the bank. The latter turned his thoughts to Janet and her expression when they parted. He had failed her that night, and now he knew it. A little sympathy, a little interest, a little tenderness would have brought out the recital of her plans, and he could have persuaded her to include him in them—to the degree, at least, of keeping in touch with him.

But, as she had told him, he had never had to think of any one but himself, so he had never learned how to do it. He was learning now.

The gentle, beautiful grace of the maiden he loved haunted his dreams, and those deep, pleading, brown eyes seemed to be gazing into his very soul. If only he could talk with her now!

CHAPTER XX

JANET'S explanation came the second morning after her abrupt departure. It would, of course, Barry had reflected. Janet was not the sort of girl to put a man through unnecessary torture.

But the letter held no suggestion of conscious power to torture the person to whom she wrote it. Instead, Janet seemed successfully engaged in torturing herself. The letter was on Barry's tray. He read and reread it during the servant's casual juggling with the breakfast service. It was dated the preceding morning, and it ran:

DEAR BARRY:

Quite suddenly I have made up my mind to leave here—not by request of the management, but for several other good reasons. One was that as I am to lead a new life hereafter—how impressive that sounds!—I'd better get away from the scenes and associations of the former life.

For another, to move is the only sure way of shaking off the gang. Some of them at least would follow me up, which they can't do if they don't know where I am. My plan is to give all my time to my singing and to try to "get somewhere."

I shall miss you, but I know that both your work and mine will go better if we cut each other out for awhile. Later, when you have had time to undo the mischief I've made in your life, I'll send you my address and we'll get together again. You've been a friend and a brother these last months, old boy; and while I've made a mighty bad return for all you've done I shall never forget it.

Your remorseful

JANET.

Barry dropped the letter at last, rested his elbows on the table and his chin in his hands, and considered the situation.

Why did the girl write about her mischief-making and remorse? She had been harping on her mischief-making ever since the Skelly episode, and during their talk the night after that affair she had seemed literally drowning in a sea of remorse. There was nothing to be gained by that sort of thing. It would hurt her spiritually, and it certainly would not benefit him.

His lips set. Only the night before she left he had told her there was no longer any danger that she would be called as a witness in the Skelly case. The same night he had told her in effect that he loved her.

But apparently she had rejected both these assurances, and now she had vanished into the unknown, or had tried to do so, on the slender pretense that she was leaving him free for his work. As if he could do his work properly when he didn't know where she was or what was happening to her! The cruelty of women appalled him.

Owing to the time he had given to Janet's letter he had not read the morning newspapers with his usual care. Over his simple luncheon he read the Skelly stories in several of them. Any doubts left in his mind concerning Strong's prospects were ended by these reports,

Strong would eventually be indicted for the murder of Dan Skelly, but his trial would be delayed as long as possible. Not even a desperate police department and district attorney's office could start a case with the evidence gathered thus far. More witnesses were sorely needed.

With a sardonic grin Barry told himself it was as if Dan Skelly had been alone in his private room all evening, had played a few restful games of solitaire, and had finally shot himself from sheer boredom. Not even the presence of the Bosco brothers in his room could be proven.

The hours crawled on. Cabot had learned, or thought he had, to put his personal affairs out of his mind during a business day. He had devoted much time to the mastery of this art, which he considered necessary to a man whose face was set toward the sun of success. But to-day the subterranean personal tide of his thoughts consciously ebbed and flowed. He took in and paid out money, smiled at depositors, went through the routine of his work with his usual brisk efficiency, but he also made plans.

He would go to Jake's that night and have supper there with Miss Morris if he could persuade the queen of the club to give him an hour of her company. Perhaps he would either find out from her where Janet was, or get Verna's promise to give him the new address as soon as she learned it.

He telephoned to Jake's that night before the rush began, and, having secured Miss Morris's surprised acceptance of his supper invitation, he reserved a table for two.

Half an hour later he entered Jake's club.

The place was still almost empty, and in the brief interval before Verna joined him he had an opportunity to observe that it was smaller than the Cockcrow, decorated less gorgeously, and in better taste, and that, so far at least, the character of its clientele was superior to that of the larger club. Society and the arts had a fuller representation. The music was as smashing as the Cockcrow's, and a little later the dancing space was as congested.

An odor of French perfume finally came toward him, accompanied by Verna, who gave a smile of intimate friendship as he rose to greet her. She wore a regal manner, and a gown even more resplendent than the one in which she had called at his apartment, and she immediately revealed a frank conviction that it was not her personal charm alone which had led him to her side.

"What's eatin' you?" she elegantly inquired as she sat down opposite him: and when he cheerfully suggested that perhaps it was hopeless love for her, she cascaded on without resentment.

"Just the same, you'll get led up the aisle some day for jokin' about serious things. There's many a dame that waits for no more than that before she ropes an' ties a guy," Verna said teasingly.

After a cocktail Verna assumed the holiday look of one who has made a Sunday excursion to her companion's presence. She began her supper with a healthy appetite, enjoyed the champagne he offered her ("one glass a night is my limit," she explained, "so you'll have to finish the bottle yourself") pointed out some of Jake's most interesting patrons, and showed a characteristic tact in going to the point of his visit as soon as possible.

She made no apologies for the morass she had recently drawn him into, though he knew she realized it.

"Why are you murderin' the hours with me, big boy?" she wanted to know. "Has Jan given you the gate?"

"I suppose it amounts to that," Barry admitted sadly, and told her about Janet's letter. "I've got to find her."

"What for have you got to? I don't see it."

He stared at his supper guest.

"You don't? I like that! There are two mighty good reasons. One is that I'm in love with her—"

"I was wise to that before you was," Verna informed him. "I was on before we wasted five minutes of our hot air that night I blew in on you."

The detail did not interest her host, who rushed on with his confidences.

"The other reason I've got to find her is because, as you yourself told me, she needs me."

His companion shook her handsome bobbed head.

"Old stuff," she murmured. "She don't need you now."

"What makes you say that?"

"There's times when there's too many folks in the world for some of us. Then we gotta flock by ourselves. That's what Jan's doin'."

"Did she tell you so?"

"She ain't told me a thing. She's give me the go-by, same as the rest of you. But I can see why, an' it beats me that you can't," Verna added thoughtfully. "Men are such boneheads."

"I suppose that's a very profound remark, Miss Morris," Barry said with deepening depression, "but what would you advise me to do?"

"I never advise nobody to do nothin'," Miss Morris forgetfully asserted.

"I know better. Who wants advice? I'm *tellin'* you to let Jan Perry do a single act till she sends for you."

That twitched the end of a trailing string of memory. He was not to see Janet till sent for. He was not to see Strong till sent for. His mission in life, just now at least, was to help those he loved by keeping out of their way.

Miss Morris also experienced a sudden stir of memory.

"Listen," she began. "Ever hear of 'Ten Grand' Mantell?"

"I've heard of him lately. I suppose he's one of the six hundred that played cards with Dan Skelly the night of the murder and then changed into thin air."

The young man spoke so bitterly that Verna gave him a quick look of sympathy.

"Don't be downhearted," she urged. "Mantell wants to see you, right now."

Barry laughed on two short notes. So there was some one who wanted to see him now, instead of later. And if he saw this gambler, and happened to be seen with him, somebody else would want to see him very soon—one Alfred E. Howson. He shook his head.

"I can't afford to be mixed up with any of the Skelly crowd," he pointed out.

Miss Morris grinned.

"Sure, I know it. Mantell does, too. That's why he had me rent him a private room—number twenty-four. You can slip in there an' get his dope an' no one will be wise. I told you when you phoned I couldn't give you more'n an hour, an' time's up now. But I wish you'd talk to Mantell before you leave the club."

"How does he know I'm here?"

"I told him. He ast me last night did I know you, an' did you ever come here. To-night, when you phoned you was comin', I got busy on the telephone."

Barry summoned the waiter, paid the bill, and escorted Miss Morris back to the hostesses' corner.

Deprived of Miss Morris's luminous presence, Barry went to Twenty-four, which proved to be a small private room at the end of a short corridor.

Mantell entered immediately afterward, closing and locking the door as soon as he had entered. He wore evening clothes and a soft hat, and carried an outer coat over his arm. This, with his hat, he threw on the nearest chair and came across to Barry with outstretched hand.

He was a handsome man in his early forties, with a slender figure, a smooth-shaven face with delicate features, graying hair and the closed look of the gambler.

With characteristic promptness Mantell explained the purpose of this meeting.

"I'm giving myself up to-morrow," he said, "as a witness—for Strong, of course, so I'm not welcomed with rapture. I expect to go in at my own convenience and to be out on bail right away. But one's never quite sure what may happen, and I wanted a word with you to-night."

Mantell laid down his cigar with the air of a man whose business is too serious for such accompaniment.

"The point is this, Mr. Cabot. I'm a friend of Brian Strong, and I'm trying to do what I can for him. I want to say first of all that I've arranged this meeting with you without his knowledge. Unfortunately, I can't do much for him myself, for by the devil's own luck I happened to be in a wash room when the shooting was done. But the man we're after has got the pretti-

est little alibi you ever saw, and all the others will swear to it. Now"—the table was between them, and he leaned across it toward Barry to emphasize his next words—"when Strong gave himself up, I was there, and I heard Detective Hennessy say that you and some woman friend of yours simply must have seen Skelly stagger out of his room after he was shot. If you did—if you saw any other man leaving that room with Skelly, or just behind him—"

"There's many a dame that waits for no more than that before she ropes an' ties a guy," Verna said teasingly

He hesitated, but Barry did not speak.

"If you did," the other went on steadily, "it might mean a lot to Strong. It might even save him. Naturally, the testimony of a man like you, with nothing to gain by giving it, ought to counteract the testimony of a lot of acknowledged gunmen."

"Yes, I see that," Barry soberly agreed.

"I realize your position, too," Mantell went on softly. "It won't help you a bit in your business life to be drawn into this case, and it's your bad luck that you happened to be at the Cockcrow that night. Moreover, you naturally want to protect the lady who was with you. But when a man's life is at stake—"

"You seem to be exaggerating my part in that affair, Mr. Mantell," said Barry.

"It may seem a small part to you," Mantell patiently pointed out. "In fact, I'm convinced that you don't realize its importance, and that this accounts for your attitude. But you certainly had a front seat for poor Skelly's entrance, and unless you were blind—"

"We may have been. We had all been drinking, you know."

Mantell looked at him a long moment.

"You hadn't," he then said, and added calmly: "There's a good deal more known about what went on at your table than you realize."

Mantell leaned closer to Barry.

"Cabot," he said very seriously, "you're a cautious and conservative young man, and you don't trust me. I can't blame you for that. But answer one question. Do you think Strong killed Skelly?"

"No, I'm convinced he didn't."

"Good! Great! Then why won't you help him?"

Barry rose.

"I told Mr. Strong," he said, "that I'd come to him any time he sent for me. We'll have to let it go at that."

Mantell dropped in his chair.

"That promise may mean anything or nothing," he said bleakly. "I'm disappointed. I had counted a lot on your help. If you find your idea changing, get in touch with me, will you?"

Mantell held out his hand with genuine friendliness and Barry took it.

"If anything turns up," he said, "I'll try to let you know."

CHAPTER XXI

MORE philosophers than Barry Cabot have spoken well of the power of hard work to exorcise worry, and during the following four months Barry decided that their conclusions and his own were sound. He took his work as others take drugs or drink, and it carried him through the days. His nights were hard, but he took no drugs or drinks to help him through those.

Even thoughts of Janet were tinged with bitterness, for his sweetheart was temporarily beyond his reach, and he hungered for the touch of her dear little hand.

Since his talk with Mantell three things had happened, the most important of them, to Barry, being first, that Brian Strong had been indicted for the murder of Daniel Skelly, and was awaiting trial; next, that no sign had come from Janet Perry; and finally, that Barry Cabot, despite his recent regretable departures from the narrow paths of bank policy in connection with the private lives of young tellers, had been given on the first of January a promotion and a substantial increase in salary.

The promotion meant more work, and Barry hurled himself into it with the zest of a man who has much to forget. He wanted to forget Janet, but he couldn't forget her for an hour. Always he seemed to be hearing her hauntingly beautiful voice, and the memory of it filled him with joy and pain. He wanted to forget Strong, but Strong also was constantly in his thoughts. Both sought to help him, however, by ignoring him.

The Skelly murder case had moved to the back pages of the newspapers for the time, and even there it was dismissed with a few paragraphs. Strong's daily life in prison, having been described in considerable detail, had ceased to interest the public.

Barry was daily at the bank ahead of time, and he worked after hours. He had ideas, and submitted them to Howson, who either jeered at them or serenely used them as his own.

Barry went to a gymnasium twice a week, to a theater every Saturday night, spent Sundays in the country, and dined with Colonel Jessup Sunday evenings. His laundry went out every Saturday afternoon and came back the following Tuesday evening. The drawers of his highboy were full of clean shirts. Cheerful new ties hung on his racks.

Outwardly he had returned to the straight and narrow path of the rising young man, and once more his feet

seemed firmly set upon it. No one but himself knew how precarious was his footing.

Despite the advice of Miss Morris, he had spent the first six weeks after Janet's disappearance in quiet but persistent efforts to trace her.

His dreams were peopled by Janet and Strong. During his few hours of sleep he saw their faces, especially Janet's wet eyes and drenched lashes.

Alfred E. Howson showed his approval of Cabot's return to normal life by twice more inviting him to dinner, and Barry found the great banker's only daughter increasingly friendly but not at all exciting.

Colonel Jessup, with what that gentleman considered deep cunning, discoursed at intervals on the " niceness " of Nancy Howson and the luck of the young fellow who got her, but his guest could never be drawn into a prolonged consideration of the heiress's charms. Instead, Barry was moved to talk about Janet Perry. Janet, indeed, had formed an embarrassing habit of walking into his conversations uninvited.

The colonel let Barry have his way; though he received with incredulity the account of Janet's change of heart and of her determination to give her life to music. Jessup was flattered by the boy's confidence and increasingly fond of hearing him talk. Young Cabot was intrenching himself more and more deeply in a lonely old heart that had just begun to discover how lonely it had been.

After four months of this, and with the last days of March, the situation changed abruptly. The district attorney set a date in May for the beginning of Strong's trial. With the announcement of this date, Barry became conscious of a disquieting aid to his inner turmoil. He was being shadowed. He had suspected the fact for several weeks before he was sure of it.

He was ignored during banking hours—it being assumed, apparently, that he was safely confined by the bonds of his work. From the time he left the bank late in the afternoon until he was finally and safely in his rooms at night he was conscious of being dogged — unobviously, skillfully, but unmistakably dogged.

Then one day he learned why he was being shadowed. Barry had objected violently to the " Hellish Twins," two of Janet's guests on the night of the Skelly murder, and he had no desire to see either of them again. But when the doorman, known as the General, brought him their card, bearing the penciled line " Urgent. Must see you," the unwilling host ordered the callers shown up to his sitting room.

Only one came. Barry had no idea which of the twins he welcomed when the immaculate young man breezed into the room, but it didn't matter. He had thought of Janet as explaining the visit, though the mental association seemed a disloyalty to her. Possibly this pallid youth had news of her.

The pallid youth had nothing of the sort. He was there on business, and after a perfunctory handshake he set it forth.

" Cabot," he said, " my name's Cary. I'm representing a man that's anxious to see you."

" Who is he?"

" That I can't tell you. It isn't a time to use names. But he wants to see you about the Skelly case."

" Oh!" Barry decided that the man would be either Strong or Mantell. Strong might feel that his time of need had come, or Mantell might be considering another appeal.

"Did Brian Strong send you?" he asked.

"No. But it's about Strong. Please don't ask any more questions, old chap," the caller added urgently. "I can't tell you who sent me."

"Why didn't he come here with you, whoever it was?"

"That's impossible. He wants you to go to him."

Barry reflected with surprise that the twin was doing his errand rather well. His manner, notwithstanding his caution in the use of names, was easy and natural.

"Where does this man want me to go?"

"Down town. East Side."

It was Mantell, of course. Barry felt sure of that.

"All right," he said briefly, and went into the next room for his hat and coat. His guest was evidently surprised by this prompt acceptance of a somewhat cryptic invitation.

"Better take a cane," Cary said. "It's a rough neighborhood."

Later Barry learned that the advice to take a cane was this messenger's tribute to an elastic conscience, on such occasions as the present one. Having suggested a cane, he felt that coming events were no longer up to him. He led his charges to their destination as the abattoir's pet leads his fellow bulls to slaughter—and occasionally with similar results.

"We'll take a taxi," he announced when they were on the sidewalk. Seeing one coming toward them as he spoke, he ran to meet it, jumped on the running board and gave the destination to the driver before the cab drew up at the curb.

"Where's Miss Perry?" Cary asked.

"I haven't the least idea."

"Haven't you, really?" The speaker was plainly intrigued by this discovery. "I thought, of course, she'd keep in touch with you, though she's given all the rest of us the air. Nice girl," he added kindly. "A little up-stage at times—"

"Would you mind not discussing Miss Perry?"

Barry had suddenly discovered that among numerous things he could not endure, the mention of Janet's name on the lips of this wastrel came first.

"Oh, all right. Didn't know you'd had a falling out."

As Barry made no reply, his companion also remained silent till the cab stopped at a point under the Third Avenue elevated.

"We'll walk from here," the messenger said, briskly getting out. "Mind paying the driver?" he airily added. "'Fraid I haven't any change."

Barry overpaid the man, and followed his guide into a street full of unusual twists and curves. However, he knew it fairly well. This unsavory region was one he sometimes visited in his noon walks, when he was making his studies of New York's varied phases of life. For ten minutes his guide backed and filled and doubled until Barry finally lost patience.

"What is all this for?" he asked irritably. "You're merely losing time. I know this region. Tell me the number and I'll lead you to it."

"Oh—"

Cary shrugged his shoulders.

"All right, come on," he conceded, and led the way down a side street to the entrance of a narrow three-story house crouched between two higher buildings. Near its entrance a choice collection of unemptied garbage cans proclaimed some street collector's indifference to his high mission.

"This way," Barry's guide said, and opening the front door with a key, entered a dimly lighted hall. "Mind your step."

Barry hesitated. His hand sought the added comfort of the loaded revolver he had slipped into his pocket when he went into his dressing room for hat and overcoat. With that, and a body six feet tall and full of trained physical energy, he ought to be able to have a peaceful chat with any denizen of this region who desired to talk to him.

"Go to it," he invited, and followed his guide up the stairs.

Cary stopped at a rear door, rapped, and receiving a response, opened the door and cautiously thrust his head around the side of it.

"Got him," he announced to some one inside. Then he waved Barry forward.

"Go right in. He's waiting for you."

Barry entered with a quick and comprehensive look around him. The room was empty save for two persons —a husky, expressionless young man bent over a radio in the corner with a pair of ear-pieces on his head, and a big man seated alone at the table, facing the door.

Barry cast a fleeting glance at the youth, recognized him, and let his eyes rest on the big man. Then he sat down leisurely.

With only the width of the table between them, the newcomer found himself looking straight into his host's heavy-lidded black eyes. Somewhere above them a baby was squalling. The expressionless young man at the radio unwinkingly watched the newcomer.

"Yer name Cabot?" the host asked gutturally.

"Yes."

Barry leaned back in his chair and rested his hands on its arms. He had decided to be as laconic as the other man, and to let his host take the burden of any conversation between them. The man was evidently Italian, but his language was that of the lower East Side.

"Yuh was at de Cockcrow de night Dan Skelly got his."

The visitor made no reply to this. It was an assertion, not a question.

"I got information," the slow, thick speech went on, "dat you seen Skelly dat night."

Still the visitor remained silent.

"Did yuh?" the big man demanded irritably.

"If I did, why should I tell you?"

Barry spoke courteously, but there was a quality in his voice that deepened the other's watchfulness.

"Because I'm astin' yuh. See?"

The big man rasped out the response in the tone of one accustomed to command, but it failed to impress his visitor. So did the attention of the youth at the radio.

"No, I don't see yet," Barry said mildly. "You haven't even told me who you are. I came here because I expected to meet some one else."

"Who was yuh expectin' t' meet?"

That point evidently interested the host, for he spoke quickly.

"I haven't the faintest idea of telling you anything until you give me a better reason for doing it than I've had yet."

Barry grinned as if they were sharing a good joke.

"See here, young feller," the big man advanced without rancor, "don't git fresh wit' me. I'm astin' yuh some questions, an' I want answers—an' dat's all dey is to it."

"And I'm trying to tell you, Mr.

Bosco, that there's a good deal more to it than that. You'll have to show me why I should answer your questions. Frankly, I don't see it."

He smiled again into Bosco's bewildered eyes. He could almost have laughed aloud. The big fellow, balked by the unexpected results of his usual opening, was clearly at a loss what to do next. But "Big Jim" was not a man to be trifled with.

"Listen, young feller," he said somberly, "yuh know me. Aw' right. Now we un'stand each oder."

"Do we?" Barry was interested. "I began to be afraid we didn't. And by the way, Mr. Bosco, now that we've met, will you call off the Jackknife at the radio and the other lads that have been trailing me around town? They're infernal nuisances, and I don't like any of them."

It was at this point that the Jackknife took off his ear-pieces and gave his entire attention to the conversation, though he took no part in it.

"Listen, kid," said Big Jim Bosco good-humoredly, "yer a little fresh, but yer all right. So far I ain't got nothin' again' yuh. I sent fer yuh t' do yuh a favor."

"Really? That's mighty good of you—if it happens to be the sort of favor I like to have done for me."

"Yuh kin decide dat yerself," Big Jim spoke impressively. "I'm tryin' t' save yer life."

"I sent fer yuh t' do yuh a favor. Big Jim spoke impressively. "I'm tryin' t' save yer life"

Barry's blue eyes widened.

"That *would* be a favor," he admitted. "But I'd like immensely to know why you are doing it, and how you're going about it."

For just an instant there was an odd flicker in the eyes that had never left his face. It was not anger. It might even have been amusement. Bosco apparently had a sense of humor of his own.

"Yuh got me goin', kid," he said easily. "Dey been tellin' me yuh ain't no talker—an' dat was yer safety belt, if yuh git me. But de way yer wastin' hot air right now makes me wonder

ain't yuh likely t' waste too much somewheres else, 'fore yuh git t'rough. An' dat," he added with deep meaning, "is w'at I'm tellin' yuh not t' do. Dat's de favor I'm doin' yuh—tellin' yuh not t' hurt yer healt' by sendin' out hot air. If yuh use yer tongue to lick yer stamps wit', an' keep it quiet de rest o' de time, dey ain't no reason I kin see why yuh can't live t' be pres'dent of a nice bank. An' I guess dat's whut yuh want. De way I see it is dis. Yuh got bot' eyes on de main chance, an' yuh ain't lookin' fer no pois'nal troubles. Dat suits me, aw' right."

The vivid blue gaze that had been on Big Jim's face till now dropped, and Barry Cabot flushed to the roots of his shining black hair. Big Jim could not frighten him, but he could humiliate him to the soul, and he had just done it.

The approbation of this thug was the last straw added to the heavy burden of self-contempt the young man before him was bearing. Very humbly Barry told himself that he deserved it.

For four months he had been lying low, playing safe, hoping against hope that by some miracle he could keep out of Strong's quicksands and save his own peace of mind and his career. He stood up quickly.

"That's that," he said. "Now you've told me I'll thank you kindly and say good night."

"Don't be too sudden, kid. I don't want no misunderstandin' 'bout dis." The big man's voice was almost cajoling. "Let's have it all clear, an' dey won't be no mistakes. P'haps yuh seen Skelly at de Cockcrow dat night. It's nothin' t' me if yuh did. But you an' me has got t' be damned sure yuh didn't see no one else dere—no one I'm int'rested in. Git me?"

"You've made that clear — so I'll say good night."

He closed the door on this final confidence and went sedately downstairs and out of the house.

In his room again he went directly to his writing table and wrote a note:

DEAR MR. MANTELL:

I see very clearly now what Brian Strong is up against. I'm recalling a few events of the night at the Cockcrow, and if you will make another appointment at Jake's or elsewhere you will find my memory in good working order.

Sincerely yours,
BARRY CABOT.

He put this in a small envelope addressed to Mantell, inclosed it in a larger envelope addressed to Jake, and with an explanatory note to the latter mailed the document at once. The decision it represented was not one for which he needed another night of deliberation.

After an additional hour at his desk he produced three more documents, one of which read as follows:

MY DEAR MR. BOSCO:

I have just mailed two sealed statements of our interview to-night to some influential friends of mine who are greatly opposed to casual murders.

If I should be "bumped off," to use the vernacular of your best circles, these friends of mine will open the statements and will become very much annoyed and very active, and all that will be bad for your brother.

Sincerely yours,
BARRY CABOT.

Then he dismissed the incident from his mind, puzzled a while over ways and means of tracing Janet, and fell asleep dreaming of the kiss that was in her eyes.

CONCLUDED IN NEXT ISSUE

Handwriting and Happiness

By JOHN FRASER

JOHN FRASER, gifted handwriting expert, who has made a name for himself both in his native England and here in America, will analyze your handwriting. If you wish to know whether your sweetheart is the right man for you to marry, inclose samples of your own and your sweetheart's handwritings and address your letter to Mr. Fraser, care "Service for Sweethearts."

If you wish his help in finding the profession for which you are best fitted, address him care "Your Career."

You may take advantage of one or both services, but a coupon must accompany each request for handwriting analysis. Coupons will be found at the end of this department.

Mr. Fraser bases his judgments on the scientific rules of graphology. In no case does he forecast the future or attempt to reveal the past. Scientific graphology undertakes only to reveal the inner secrets of your nature.

As many answers will be given on these pages as space permits. All other questions will be answered by mail. A stamped, addressed envelope must accompany your request for analysis.

Girls' clubs or organizations may secure Mr. Fraser's services for an evening's entertainment by addressing him care this magazine.

"ALL the world loves a lover." And I'm no exception. Even after a nine or ten-hour day, and sometimes a seven-day week, I still have enough interest and sympathy remaining to begin again each morning on the batch of letters the postman deposits on my desk. There are never too many of you sweethearts for me!

And I take just as much interest in setting you right on your careers, too. Happiness, of course, is the great thing; and after all, jobs mean money, and money can mean clothes and comforts, and clothes help in attracting others to us—who knows which new friend will bring us happiness?

Bessie J. is very sure she has found

her happiness, and she sends me some handwritings to prove it. The whole tone of Bessie's letter is optimistic and determined. Bessie is a die-hard where love is concerned. She is one of, oh, so many who persist in looking for the blue sky long after the sun has set.

But Bessie is hoping against hope. Take a look at her own and her sweetheart's handwriting:

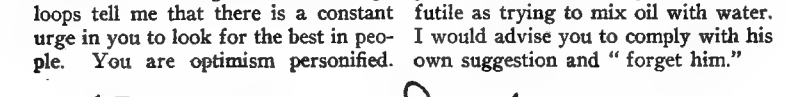
SERVICE FOR SWEETHEARTS

What surprises me most of all, Bessie, as I study the two samples of handwriting you send me, is the great gulf which lies between you and Jim, in the matter of natures. You two young people have really very little in common with each other. And such being the case, you should look upon this parting of the ways as a blessing, rather than "feeling broken hearted over this state of matters," as you put it. You should be glad the break has come. Let me tell you why I think so.

By the slope of your penmanship I observe that you are extremely affectionate. You are generous, and self-sacrificing to the *n*th degree. In fact, you are never happy unless you are giving to others, and particularly to the one you love. Coupled with this, your mind is cast in a big mold. Your high loops tell me that there is a constant urge in you to look for the best in people. You are optimism personified. Though you are by no means an angel, you certainly have the faculty of cheering and helping those around you by your sunny and transparent disposition.

When I look at Jim's handwriting, every curve and line indicates a strong deceitfulness. A fellow who can keep a straight face, and at the same time laugh "up his sleeve" at a girl. His tightly-closed "A's" and "O's," which are varying in size, point to cunning and trickery. The irregularity of the "T" bars is another unmistakable sign of this boy's undecided disposition. The little bars give him away at once. Jim has a very vacillating nature, and a character which could hardly be depended upon.

For two such natures as yours to expect matrimonial felicity would be as futile as trying to mix oil with water. I would advise you to comply with his own suggestion and "forget him."



As far as I can see, you have been blessed with good judgment. No one could have chosen a more suitable beau and life companion than you have (Madge K., Newark, New Jersey). To be properly mated is two-thirds of

the battle, and a guarantee to matrimonial happiness. And that's exactly what you two young people are. Let me state my reasons for thinking so. Your own handwriting reveals to me that you are a girl with a great deal of intuitive common sense. "Mother-wit," I would call it. You evidently had a practical mother, who went about her household affairs in a businesslike manner. You've inherited these same instincts, and as a result, know your way about in the world. Your knowledge of men and things is remarkable, a fact which enables you not only to be a good household manager, but also a very capable business woman.

Charlie's nature is of the massive type. He thinks twice before he speaks once. His ideas are constructive. His opinions are worth listening to. You would never find anything coarse or objectionable in his manners. Though impatient at times, for a man, he has himself well under control. He will make a fine compensation-balance to your more hasty moods and temperament. You both have your quota of sentiment. If anything, he possesses a little more than you do. This is as it should be, since a man's affection is apt to cool much quicker than a woman's. Altogether, I see no reason why you two young folk should not have many golden years of happiness coming to you. Accept my very best wishes, Madge. Good luck to you both.

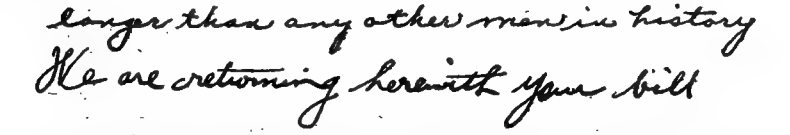
I'm alone. I like to be alone
I do not wish to miss any.

I see no reason why you and Tom (Mabel B., Utica, New York), should not be comparatively happy and contented with each other. And this opinion is based on the fact that he has many important traits that you might have been all the better to have. He, on the other hand, requires *you* to counterbalance and correct some flagrant mannish characteristics he will have to throw overboard when wedding and honeymoon are over.

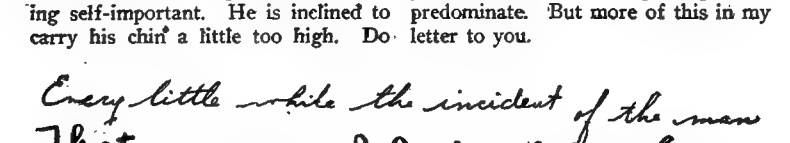
I observe from your handwriting that you are an extremely affectionate girl. You simply live for love, and love to be loved. It is meat and drink to you. You are buoyant and mirthful. You have a faculty of seeing the funny side of a situation. You are a great talker. Perhaps you are a little too fond of hearing the sound of your own voice. Use the soft pedal a little more in this respect. When it comes to the management of a home, you're there "with the goods." In other words, Tom need have no anxiety about the finances of the household. He would do well to appoint you right away to the keepership of the privy purse. You really know the value of money, and have the instinct of an American foxhound when it comes to marketing.

Tom's penmanship reveals to me another type of nature. No one could call him emotional. He takes things pretty calmly. Though I would call him sentimental, he would never really enthuse over anything. His boss would call him a "level-headed fellow," and so he is. Then again, he is temperamental. He gets moody, and has the "blues" quite often. Here's where your sunny nature will fit in. This

man will be all the better of having a little optimist around him like yourself. And all this leads me to say that you make a well-matched pair.



After reading your interesting letter twice over (Helen F., Cleveland, Ohio), I put on my "thinking cap," and have had it on ever since. The number of questions you ask me regarding your sweetheart's virtues and weaknesses, could not possibly be answered here, but rather than disappoint you, I will make it my business to send you a private letter, and give you a few more pointers concerning Walter's eccentricities. It is quite obvious to me that you are a very discreet girl when it comes to choosing a husband. Though Walter is no saint, at the same time he is a boy with many sterling qualities. He belongs to the type of men whose presence dominate. It matters little where he goes, people will stop and look at him, and ask who he is. I call that a distinctive personality. Coupled with this, I notice he has great will-power. He would be rather insistent at times. A man like Walter is apt to get "spoiled," if you give in too much to his whims. Take a note of this. He also impresses me as being self-important. He is inclined to carry his chin a little too high. Do your utmost to get him out of this habit before you get married. You'll never be able to do it after. By the formation of his "F's" I find he is not given to wasting his breath very much when sympathy is necessary. A woman's tears don't mean a thing to him. As a matter of fact, it maddens him to see a girl in that condition. When you are married, and require money for a new dress, don't draw his attention to your poor wardrobe, and start sobbing over it. Make a frontal attack on his pocketbook without any humming or hawing, and he'll "come across" in a jiffy. Most men are built that way; they've got no use for "sob-sisters." Though I have confined myself to one or two of his weaknesses in this analysis, I want to say that Walter is the type of fellow who will make an ideal husband, for after all, actions speak louder than words. In the last analysis this boy will prove himself to be every inch a man when you get through with him. Regarding your own nature, your good qualities predominate. But more of this in my letter to you.



I would have been much better pleased (Lenore W., Birmingham, Alabama), if I could have given you a word of congratulation on your choice of sweetheart. As it is, I'm afraid it's to be the other way about.

I can only indorse your own surmises about Gilbert's temperament, with perhaps a little more emphasis on the "selfishness" that you mention. I'm sorry to say you two young people are not quite suited to each other. And this conclusion is based on the fact that *your* nature is a quiet, modest, and unassuming one. I would say you are spiritually minded, and a lover of the higher and better things in life. This does not necessarily mean that you are religious. It does imply, however, that your whole disposition is of a much finer texture than Gilbert's is. You are romantically inclined. A good book, a quiet hour with the victrola or the radio, or, better still, an evening at home with loving arms around you, appeal to you much more than the dance hall or the night club. You are a girl who loves to spend and be spent in the service of others. One of your drawbacks, however, is your impatience with other people. A slow person around you annoys and disturbs your peace of mind. Your temper is also worth the watching. It is quick and fiery while it lasts. Despite these little weaknesses, you are a very feminine sort of girl.

What I know of Gilbert's nature, after an analysis of his handwriting, may not surprise you, since you have known him so long. But it may doubly assure you that he is not your right mate in matrimony. Gilbert's a man who likes his own way in everything. He is somewhat domineering in his manner, and would be at times very reticent. A man who would pretty often keep his own counsel, and tell you very little of his affairs. It is true he is rather ambitious and anxious to get on in the world, and make money, but this same ambition has got nothing to do with home making, or an increased interest in your happiness. In a word, Gilbert has so little in common with you, I would advise you, Lenore, to think twice before you spoke once when he mentions a proposal of marriage to you.

YOUR CAREER

Tell them your story in this magazine

(Jessie O. D., Dallas, Texas.) Your letter interested me. It was candid and straight to the point. Any girl with your vim and personality need not despair about getting on in the world. It is true that your profession—music—is overcrowded in America, but despite that fact, there are still wonderful opportunities for those who have talent such as yours. Your whole penmanship exudes with imaginative power. It's not in you to be a mechanical technicist. You are more of a creator than an imitator. Regarding your question as to your best chances of success. If I were you I would be very careful to have a signed contract in my hands before joining any act in the vaudeville profession. As a matter of fact, unless the remuneration is all the greater, I would not advise you to throw away your ability on any trouping proposition as you had offered to you the other week. You are destined to pick bigger plums from off the tree of music before you are many years older. And that's not maybe, either. I wish you the best of luck.

(Sarah A. W., Canton, Ohio.) I quite agree with you that office work is drudgery, particularly to those with a disposition such as yours. At your age—seventeen—very few girls have

"found themselves" as far as their life work is concerned. And you are no exception to the rule. At the present moment I observe that you are vacillating and undecided, with very little ambition to be anything worth while. As a matter of fact, you are following the path of least resistance, and drifting with the current. One of your weaknesses is your habit of putting off things. So long as you give in to this procrastinating feeling you can never hope to attain to much in the business world. "Never put off till tomorrow the thing you can do to-day," may be a trite piece of advice, but nevertheless it is good philosophy. I would advise you to concentrate a little more on your present job. By so doing it may surprise you to discover the "kick" one can get out of even filing letters. Just have patience.

to write that

(Bertha M., Springfield, Massachusetts.) You are a girl who has apparently been accustomed to living in the wide open spaces. The whole tone of your letter is indicative of breeziness. With a mind so synthetic, and a brain so active as yours, I would advise you right away to give the work-aday world the benefit of your ability in the form of literature. Your outlook on life is so varied, and your optimism so wholesome, it would be a pity if such excellent traits as yours should go to seed. The "hard row to hoe" that you speak of is nothing to worry over. Success has never been attained so far by lying on flowery beds of ease. Your row is not any harder than the other fellow's. You only think so on account of having to put up with so much adverse criticism at home. When you learn that a prophet has no honor in his own country, you will understand what I mean. Close your ears to those pessimists around you, and get down to the business of writing. The editors are waiting for such an one as you.

of the day to

(Mary J., Albany, New York.) Though your strongest desire is to be a writer of fiction, I'm afraid my advice to you will be somewhat disconcerting when I tell you that there are openings in the business world which would be much more suitable to your talents than story writing. Apart from ability altogether, a person who intends to become a writer of fiction must have an enormous amount of patience. Rejection slips from editors are by no means inspiring missives to receive in your morning mail, and this is only one of the many heartbreaks that comes to the struggling writer. As far as I can see, patience is a minus quantity in your make-up, and an uncontrollable temper is never far away from you. You have such a splendid business head on your shoulders I would not hesitate to advise you to give your whole-hearted attention to secretarial work. Many a busy executive would be glad to have your assistance in the straightening out of his affairs.

Caressing the deep

(Pauline L. G., Brooklyn, New York.) Your two years' experience in the beauty parlor will stand you in good stead. It is not a waste of time as far as you are concerned. It is

simply an apprenticeship, since you are destined to go far and accomplish much in this profession. You have splendid leadership qualities, plus imagination. Furthermore, you have the faculty of making friends wherever you go. You are a good mixer, and possess the ladylike manners necessary for such a place of business. I observe, however, that one of your weaknesses is a tendency to be too generous and openhanded in your dealings with others. This may be all right among friends, but in the business world it's all wrong. You'll have to get a little more Scotch into your nature, and rather run the risk of being called hard boiled than to be dubbed a human lollipop. Since you are cut out and specially built for the beauty parlor business, go right in and win.

Will you please

(Laura C., Bristol, Pennsylvania.)

I can quite understand why you are in doubt as to whether the selling of insurance is your right vocation. You must remember, Laura, that you have been blessed, or cursed, with an extremely affectionate nature. You are a very sensitive girl, and consequently the "cold shoulder" which you must swallow day after day, from people who never think about old age, or emergencies, becomes distasteful to you. I must say you have all the earmarks of a saleswoman. By the formation of your "D's" and "T's," I believe you are a fluent and convincing talker. Your long lower loops reveal to me keen business acumen, and your straightforwardness and honesty of purpose qualifies you for a position of trust. My advice to you is, keep going. Don't get discouraged though business is somewhat slow. Get a little more backbone and a little less wishbone into your system. The day is not far distant when you'll be walking on "Easy Street" in your profession.

Girls' clubs and organizations can secure the services of John Fraser by writing to him care of this magazine. An evening's entertainment and instruction of surpassing interest is provided by Mr. Fraser's analyses.

If you belong to a club suggest to the other members that they set aside a meeting to be addressed by Mr. Fraser. Vocational problems of the members can be solved by having this expert in graphology analyze handwriting specimens. Simply address him care ALL-STORY, 280 Broadway, New York City.

ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway,
New York City.

This coupon is not good after October 19. A two cent stamp must be enclosed when forwarding.

I enclose handwriting specimen for
—Service for Sweethearts.
—Your Career.
(Check which you prefer.)

Name.....

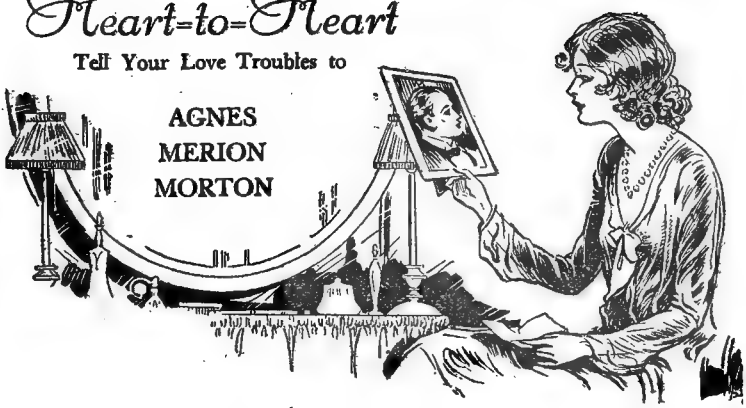
Street and No. .....

City..... State..... .

Heart-to-Heart

Tell Your Love Troubles to

AGNES MERION MORTON



MRS. MORTON wants you to feel that she is a friend—some one to whom it is a comfort to tell your problems, who will advise and encourage you in your struggle for happiness, and who is always here to help. She is interested in you. Write to her freely.

Every letter is confidential.

As Mrs. Morton receives so many letters, she cannot publish answers to all in the space allotted to her. Some, therefore, are answered by mail. Be sure to enclose a stamped, addressed envelope with your question.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I am a girl of eighteen, have brown eyes and blond hair, and am engaged to a young medical student of twenty. He is in college, crazy about his profession, but so anxious to get married that he wants me to elope. Now, I don't think he should ask that. He wants me to elope because if his parents knew he was married they would stop his going to college, and he thinks the world would end if they did that. I think it's a girl's right to have a church wedding if she wants one, and a bridal gown and to be able to invite her friends. It's the one big time in a girl's life when she has all the attention she wants, and he ought to be willing to do that much for me. But he doesn't want to do anything to interfere with his career, nor bring his parents down on him, but he keeps telling me all the time he can't live without me, and how happy we would be and how much I could help him with his work. He says if I will only consent he will work to graduate a year sooner, so that we can begin to thing of our own home. That sounds wonderful to me, but I can't see why I should have to elope to get it. He says the only reason his folks don't want him to marry me is because we are too young. Then why doesn't he want to wait? But he worries me asking all the time. I have just as much right to have my way as he has to have his, and if a man isn't willing to give a girl her own way before marriage how much chance will she have of getting it after? Anyway I'd rather

walk into married life by the front door than sneak in by the back. I do love him, and I'm willing to make sacrifices for him, but I don't think he's giving me a square deal. Do you think it best to do what he wants me to? I could give up the church wedding if it really was best for him.

DOUBTFUL GIRL.

My dear little girl, indeed you are not getting a square deal. Your young man seems to have a good share of selfishness in his composition to ask you to forego all that a girl looks forward to from the time she is born. And all he offers you is a very uncertain future, and the possible enmity of his parents. Not a promising outlook for a girl of eighteen. Deception and mad haste form an unsound basis for marriage. You are quite right in telling him he must wait. Your love will be all the sweeter and surer for the delay, and he will respect and admire the character which can stand firm in time of stress. So wait for your wedding, Doubtful Girl, and I know it will bring you all the happiness you desire. Write to me again.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I'm in such a queer fix I feel I must write and tell you about it. I live in a small town in the Middle West, and have been engaged for a year to a young fellow who lives a few miles from here. I met him first at a barn dance in the country, and he was such an elegant dancer that I fell in love with him on the spot. He liked me all right, too, and after we had wandered around in the moonlight a little, and talked about things, he asked to come and see me. My parents liked him as soon as they saw him. He kept on coming for about six months, and now we are engaged. Ever since we got engaged he seems to have developed the queerest qualities! He is as nice and sweet as can be, but he seems to want to oppose everything I do. He loves to dance, and I like dancing all right, too— That's what really got us engaged. But I don't want to be a Texas Guinan. If I want to walk somewhere he thinks we'd better ride; if I want to read, he wants to play bridge! if I want to go to the movies he thinks we'd better dance, and so on. It's that way every time, but he is so nice and considerate about it all. I don't know what to think. It's just dawned on me lately that he is the kind who will always be contrary. He was just born that way. One night I wanted to go to see Norma Talmadge in a big picture, but he wanted to go on a party, and he got very angry with me because I didn't want to go with him, and we had our first quarrel. He called me a spoil-sport, and wound up by saying "You are not the girl I thought you were at all. You are not my kind." That hurt me. After that I began to think that we would never get on together when we were married, because neither of us likes the things the other does. You see how it is, and we'd both of us get more that way if we were married. I don't know how long I could stand it, and it's hard on him, too. Dear Mrs. Morton, don't you think I ought to break the engagement rather than run the risk of making us both unhappy? I feel as if I opposed him about as much as he does me, so I'll sign myself

CONTRARY MARY.

I am so glad you wrote me, Contrary Mary, for I truly think I can help you to decide. Maybe not just as you hope, for I honestly don't think

you can find happiness with this man. I once knew a young girl married four years who said to me: "Will and I are awfully happy, and I think it's because we both like the same things." Now, dear, there's a great secret in those words. There's more happiness in a congenial marriage than in the most passionate love. As your tastes and likings mature, so will his, along different channels, and the first thing you know you may develop into one of these nagging, quarreling wives. If you give in to him in everything, you may become a mere echo of his desires and opinions. Don't be dazzled by his good looks or his attractive ways—these don't make a happy home. I would break the engagement, Mary. Then wait a little and see if some one doesn't come along who will understand you better and fill the empty place in your heart by saying, "You are the girl I have looked for all my life—the only kind I want to marry. You are *my* kind." Don't be discouraged or disheartened, for he will surely come. Look ahead, not back, and know there's a good time coming.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I am a girl twenty-two years old, employed by a big New York firm. I worked for two years after my father died to help support my mother, who could not then get along without my help. Three months ago I met a young fellow who works in a different department of the same firm. I liked him from the first. He is very handsome and jolly, but he likes a good time too well, I'm afraid. We've been engaged now for a month. He earns plenty of money for us to get married on, but he seems to like to go to night clubs and on parties better than getting married. I try to tell him he ought to save money to buy baby shoes, but he would rather step out now, and let the future take care of itself. He's willing enough to take me out anywhere he likes to go and have a wild party, as he's hail fellow well met with everybody, but he can't seem to see the use of saving a penny. I tell him we'll be ready to die before we ever get married if he goes on like this, but he only laughs at me. George is a darling and I simply adore him, and the thought of losing him just breaks my heart, but something has to be done. Please, dear Mrs. Morton, I have no one to turn to but you. Shall I give in to him, or shall I lose him?

MYRA H.

No, my dear little girl, you should neither give in to him nor lose him. George is probably naturally extravagant and likes to feel himself on top of the wave. There is no real harm in spending money you honestly earn, and he has probably a dozen good qualities to offset his love of spending. You seem to be a good manager, so why not try this plan? Get a budget book and start him in itemizing everything he spends. I believe it would be an eye-opener when he sees in black and white what he gets rid of for pleasure. Besides, it's splendid fun to make out a budget. I know, for I've tried it. It's a real game. Play this game together—laugh him out of his extravagance, and I believe you will win out.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I haven't any one to talk this over with, so I'm going to ask your advice. I am a young woman thirty years old, and have been engaged to a young Scotch engineer for eight years. My father and mother are dead, but he lives with his parents and thinks the world of them. Well, he's right in a

way, for they are the real Scotch brand—thrifty isn't the word for it—and have scratched and scraped for every nickel so he could have an education and become a successful man. His mother is old now, but she does every bit of the housework, makes all her sheets and pillow cases, every one of his shirts, and even tries to make his trousers. Gavin is all right, except that he's inherited over-thriftiness. He's determined not to get married until he has a lot more money than I think he need have, and he saves every penny over his expenses. He says he'd be ashamed to marry a girl unless he could really take care of her and provide for old age together, but I tell him if he doesn't stop worrying about the old age part, and look a little more to the present, we'll both be old before he's ready. And even then, I believe he'd want to wait until he thought he had enough to bury us. Real Scotch, you see! We got engaged when I was twenty-two and he was twenty-eight. Now I'm thirty and he's thirty-six, and still waiting. He declares his parents have been so good to him he can't leave them until he has provided for their comfort. Well, that's all right in a way, but how about me? I've waited for him eight years, and that shows I love him, or I'd never have waited that long. Sometimes I think I'll break the engagement, but I don't want to be an old maid, and when you're thirty it isn't easy to find anybody who wants to marry you. I'm good looking and clever, but it would be hard all the same. Do you think you could help me?

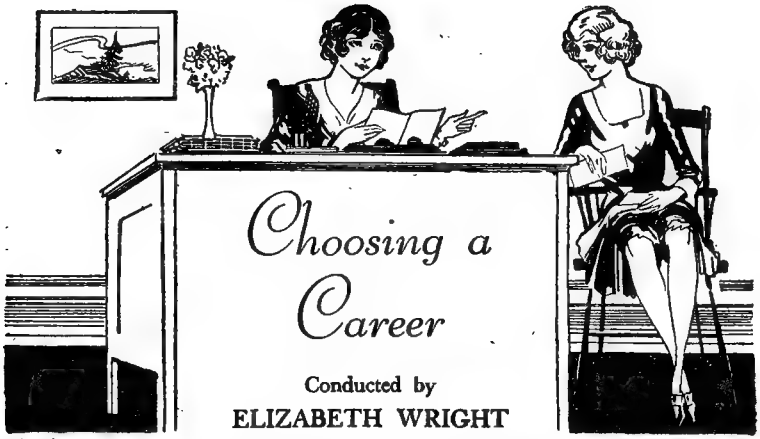
WORRIED JANE.

I should have a heart-to-heart talk with that young man, Worried Jane, and try to make him see reason. For it is not reasonable to expect a girl to wait eight years for a man, and yet his motive seems to be good. The danger seems to lie not in his wanting to make ample provision for the future, but in that basic element of the Scotch nature which forbids the unnecessary spending of a single penny. If you marry him finally your own nature, which seems open and generous, might be cramped within the same limits. True loving is giving, but this young man delays his gift too long. Try to make him see your viewpoint; keep an open mind and listen to what you have to say. If he cannot see eye to eye with you after a frank talk, and still sticks to his own opinion, you have no alternative but to break the engagement. I have faith that some man would come into your life some day who would know how to value the steadfast and loyal character you have proved yourself to be, my dear.

DISAPPOINTED. — A thoroughbred never gives up. So just grit your teeth, turn your back on disappointment, and sternly resolve to win in spite of all the hard luck and disagreeable happenings you have encountered. Turn your clouds about you. You know,

"The under side of every cloud
Is bright and shining,
I therefore turn my clouds about,
And always wear them inside out
to show their lining."

LAZY MARY.—You should wake up mentally. Sooner or later you'll find you have to think of other people. Isn't it better to have them like you than to be so indifferent? Like breeds like, you know. Wake up—look around you and see all the good in this big old world.



Choosing a Career

Conducted by
ELIZABETH WRIGHT

HAVE you found your ideal job? Are you satisfied with your present salary? If not, let Miss Wright advise you.

In these pages many new and attractive professions for girls are discussed. If one of these appeals to you, and you wish to learn more about it, address your letter to Elizabeth Wright, care "Choosing a Career" Department. A stamped, addressed envelope will bring you an answer by mail.

HOW would you like to own a studio of your own where you might see your clientele by appointment only and turn over a nice profit with each appointment?

No, it's not a dream either. Let me explain:

The other day I found myself at the Grand Central Station in New York City with half an hour to wait for my train. Near me was a young woman in the same predicament. In a few moments we were conversing and she told me her business.

"I'm a hat artist," she said. "And I'm going out of town to take an order for an autumn wedding. I've got to meet the bridesmaids this evening and match my colors to their gowns by electric light. It is to be a chrysanthemum wedding. Eight girls are to be gowned in tones of yellow, rose and cream. I am going to select the best shade for each one and make the hats right on the head so to speak."

"How did you ever get started in such a line?" I asked. "And didn't it take a great deal of money to begin with?"

She shook her head. "I began on nothing at all. I was working in a cigar box factory, lining the boxes, and making less than eighteen dollars a week. Of course I wanted to better my condition, but at the time I didn't see how I could do it.

"Then opportunity knocked at my door.

"One evening a girl friend came to call. She wore a green straw hat with a wide floppy brim. It was most unbecoming to her and I asked her

to leave it with me. That night, before I went to bed, I cut down the brim, lowered the crown and made a smart little straw ornament for one side. I had among my clippings the picture of just such a hat and I copied it exactly. It was a success. She paid me a dollar and it gave me an idea. If I could make a hat look nice on one girl I could do it for another.

"The very next day the forelady of our establishment complained that she couldn't get a hat large enough for her head. Her hair was long and she wore it in a big coil over each ear. It was a lovely goldy brown.

"I offered to make a hat to fit her and she gave me time off at noon to buy the materials. I selected three shades of felt, a reddish brown, soft tan and old gold. That night I cut out a little round crown. I had measured her head and knew the size to the fraction of an inch. To the crown I sewed a rolling brim, taking care that the brown came next to the face and, finally, I cut out small yellow flowers and applied the petals to brim and crown. Again I had a picture to guide me. But I added a few original touches of my own.

"When the forelady put it on she had to admit that it was the most becoming hat she had ever owned. She paid me four dollars and, as I bought my materials at the five and ten, and made the hat in an evening, I felt well paid.

"So far my work had been among friends. But my next job fell right out of a clear sky. I was crossing Sixteenth Street one evening about five when a woman leaned from her car and asked me if there was a millinery shop in that neighborhood. She was a stranger in town and needed a hat at once.

"Here was my chance. I told her that I didn't know of a shop. But that I was a private milliner and would be glad to make a hat for her. She replied that she was going to dinner at seven, and to the theater, and she was afraid there wouldn't be time. Well, you may be sure that I talked fast. I assured her that I could give her a hat within the hour.

"The upshot of it was that she drove me to a handsome hotel on lower Fifth Avenue and showed me the gown she was going to wear that evening. It was black velvet heavily beaded in steel, a handsome imported gown. At the shoulder was a magnificent crushed pink velvet rose.

"I dashed away telling her I would return shortly. The woman's hair was white and she wore it piled on top of her head in an old-fashioned way. But I made the most of it. I had seen a little French hat on a model in a show window. It was made of maline braided to look like braids of hair, one of those little hats that are practically invisible. I copied it from memory and I can tell you my fingers flew.

"In an hour I was back at the hotel with a *chapeau* which made the woman cry out with delight. A bunch of tiny pink chiffon rosebuds softened the outline. I asked ten dollars for the hat. The lady paid it so gladly that I knew I could have asked her fifteen—and got it.

"'Now,' she said. 'You must give me your address and your telephone. I'm going to tell all my friends about you. I live in Ohio. But I'm sure you can make hats for me—'

"I told her I would send it to her. Next day I ordered a phone put in. Two weeks later I had my first order, long distance. Within a month I had a place of my own. It is a roof studio and I've been busy ever since. I never

charge over ten dollars for a hat. I never make one without first seeing the gown with which it is to be worn, and I never use common flowers and cheap ornaments. Each hat is a creation. My usual price is eight dollars and I find I can make a big profit at that figure.

"I advise the girl who is going into private millinery to get a friend to work with her—to make the accessories.

"A very necessary and well-paying accessory is the wrist bag. It must match the hat and be up-to-the-minute at the same time. Suppose a girl is wearing a hat to business, a felt hat, say in dark red, or it might be blue, or brown, or any other color.

"She needs a handbag to match. If she's tired of leather she wants a bag of canvas or heavy dull brocade. Or she could use a leather bag if it had one of the new impressionistic designs painted, or splashed, upon it. The cheapest bag becomes distinguished if treated in this way. I could tell you plenty about this—how to make and sell these useful hand bags.

"I saw a bag made out of an old red cloth coat. It had a silver fastening. At one corner of the bag was a heavy monogram in a circle. The girl who made this in an evening sold it at once for six dollars."

A fascinating as well as a profitable way to earn one's living, isn't it?

If a girl has the knack to begin with it should be very easy for her to get started in her own locality. And I'm convinced that there are many girls working at uncongenial jobs whose ability to design and make their own clothes and hats would, if capitalized, make them independent and happy.

If you wish to ask any questions about this profession, I'll be pleased to answer them.

In the next issue I shall tell you about opportunities in the various types of tea rooms.

This Week's Hint For Earning More Money

You may have thought of buying quaint rag rugs to brighten up some corner of your home, but perhaps you haven't thought of making—or at least aiding in the manufacture—of these colorful floor coverings.

There's profit in it for the girl who wants to make more money and has a few evenings free each week.

Begin by collecting from your friends any scraps of left-over material or very old dresses they may have. Cut these into strips half an inch wide and stitch the strips together. When you have a sufficiently large ball of material you may either sell it to a weaver who makes these rugs or—better still—invest in a little hand loom of your own and make your own rugs.

The half-inch strips of material are first braided before the process of rug making is begun. The braiding must be done carefully and neatly. Finally the braids of material are sewn round and round into rugs.

A tidy little sum may be made in this manner.

In Confidence

Practical First Aid to Everyday Living

Conducted by

DOROTHEA DALE

ANY question about the little problems that confront you daily in your business or social life Mrs. Dale will be glad to answer. No question is too small. Write her about anything that is perplexing you—how to word a letter, how to travel, what present to give, what to say and when, table etiquette, et cetera.

If an emergency arises and you need immediate advice your letter will be answered by return mail, if you will inclose a return envelope stamped and addressed.

All letters will be held in strict confidence.

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I have a beautiful big diamond engagement ring with three little diamonds on one side and three on the other. My wedding ring is to be in diamonds, too. We are going to be married October 24, then we are going to different southern States in his car —it's a big Cadillac. Won't that be nice? We can't be gone more than a month, because his business has to be looked after.

But, Mrs. Dale, you will be doing me a big favor if you will tell me this: when I am being married what shall I do with my engagement ring? I have noticed that married women wear their wedding rings *under* their engagement rings. Am I going to be happy, Mrs. Dale?

JEAN ANNE.

Dear little Jean Anne, you may leave your diamond ring off entirely during the ceremony, if you wish. But it is quite customary for a bride to wear her engagement ring on her right hand, and then put it on the left hand above the new wedding ring when she changes into her traveling costume.

You are going to be happy if *my* good wishes count for anything, Jean Anne!

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I am so happy—and so unhappy. I am to be married at Thanksgiving to the best man in the world. Now, I am only twenty-four, but it is my second marriage. When I was fifteen I ran away with a man—I thought I loved him—I didn't know any better. He began abusing me two weeks after our wedding day and before the year was out he deserted me for another woman

and I never saw him again. My little baby came and died, and for a long, long time my life was not worth living.

Now I have met the man who can make up to me for all my misery, and have divorced that other under the Seven Years' Absence Law.

But here's the trouble. I think, don't you, that every girl has a right to a real wedding, and I had nothing but a hole-and-corner affair before, so I want this one to be as beautiful as any girl ever had. My parents are willing to help all they can, and I have saved enough money to do it "in style." But my girl friends say it would be *just ridiculous* for me to wear white, with a veil and train.

Don't you understand, Mrs. Dale, I don't feel as if I'd ever been married before. It was all so long ago, and it turned out such a nightmare. This man is my true mate—this is my real marriage. So why mustn't I show everybody I think so?

I wish you were on this side of the continent, Mrs. Dale. Would you come to my wedding?

ELIZABETH OF OREGON.

My dear, I sympathize with you sincerely, but it would be considered very bad form indeed for you to wear a veil and bridal white at your second wedding. After all, there are certain forms which are almost traditions, and people of good taste do not offend against them. A young bride's white apparel is symbolic of her maidenhood.

Of course, however, it will be perfectly all right for you to have as elaborate and beautiful a ceremony as you like—to fill the church with flowers and crowd it with your friends. You may have ushers, and be given away by your father, but you should have only one maid or matron of honor to precede you to the altar — *not more than one*. And you may wear a beautiful and brilliant costume—a flowered or figured silk, perhaps.

I am sure that you will look just as lovely as you would in white satin and orange blossoms, and that you will be just as happy. In fact, a great deal happier, for if you fly in the face of convention, no matter how good your reason, the criticism of others will hurt you sorely; and, moreover, it would take you years to live the bad impression down. Your wedding will seem just as "real" to you, whatever you wear. It is love that sanctifies a marriage, Elizabeth, not the trappings.

May I say that I wish I could be present when you are united to the man of your heart?

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I recently came over on the train from Philadelphia to New York with a man who used to work in the same office with me. We met by accident. He is married. It was the noon train, and I went into the diner and he was there and jumped up and asked me to sit at his table. Then he paid for my lunch, but when I told my mother she scolded me and said it was just the same as going to a restaurant with him. Was it wrong, Mrs. Dale, and *why?*

ANNA B.

I dislike to contradict your mother, Anna, but I cannot see any harm in such a little episode as you describe. So long as it was only one meal, and the cost comparatively trifling, you would probably have offended him by refusing to give him your check. If he had tried to be familiar with you, you would have had to insist on being

independent in small money matters, but not otherwise.

DEAR MRS. DALE:

My husband died a short time ago and I wish to have some new calling cards printed. My husband's name was Richard C. Norton—may I keep it, or must I use my maiden name now?

MARY LEE NORTON.

It is not considered improper for a widow to use her maiden name on her cards, but the most approved fashion would be for you to continue to use your husband's Christian name. That is, your card should read "Mrs. Richard C. Norton." "Mrs. Mary Lee Norton" might be taken by those who do not know the circumstances to signify that you have been divorced. And unless you dislike the name for which the initial "C" stands, it would be better to have it spelled out in full. Also, let me caution you against "printed" cards—they *must* be engraved.

DEAR EDITOR:

Here's my opinion of the stories in this issue:

Remembered Rapture.....

.....

The Paper Doll Bride.....

.....

Her Stolen Thrill.....

.....

Fighting for Love.....

.....

Dazzled Heart.....

.....

Little Love Pirate.....

.....

Two-Time Sweetheart.....

.....

The Timid Vamp.....

.....

My name is.....

My address is.....

Don't Miss It!

Mariel looked up into the eyes of Raoul Fernier, handsome French ace of the air . . . His embrace was tight. She surprised a look of yearning on his face. It almost frightened her . . . Against her will Mariel allowed him to lead the way beyond the swinging lanterns. She did not understand why, but she felt she was being a traitor to Betty . . .

"There is something you must know," her father said later. "But before I tell you, I want you to promise that you won't divulge the secret to Betty."

What was the secret her father told her? Why couldn't she marry the French aviator—or any other man?

Read

WOOING WINGS

A fascinating serial of love on air and land by Clelia S. Mount, which begins in the next issue of ALL-STORY, on the stands October 16th.